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YOUNG MRS. JARDINE.

VOL. II.

YOUNG MRS. JARDINE.

BY

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THE AUTHOR OF

"JOHN HALIFAX, GENTLEMAN,"

&c., &c.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. II.

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YOUNG MRS. JARDINE.

CHAPTER I.

A Thunderstorm.

THE wedding-day came and passed. It was not a day of sentimental emotion: the principal consciousness which it brought to Roderick was that there were certain inevitable things to do and say, which he did and said to the best of his ability; thinking the while that his wedding-day, did it ever come, should be as unlike this day as possible.

So Bella Jardine and her new "gudeman," if such a vulgar word could be used of Mr. Alexander Thomson without scandalizing himself and his family, were floated away into felicity, while the hundred or more particular friends who had been invited to see them "turned off," as the young lady with whom Roderick had to open the ball expressed it, danced till far into the "sma' hours" with spirit and enthusiasm. In fact, no marriage could have gone off with greater "aclaw," as Mrs. Jardine declared, and she was right; her own indomitable energy, good temper, and good spirits contributing in no small degree to that desirable result.

But with all these excellent qualities, one flags sometimes at nearly sixty; and

during the following day, anxiously as Roderick sought a chance of speaking to his mother, she was, either intentionally or unintentionally, wholly invisible. Not till after dinner—nay, nearly bed-time, did the mother and son come really face to face, sitting alone together in the large, silent drawing-room, which looked especially dreary; so much so that Mrs. Jardine, saying something about "going to bed early," rang for the servants, and conducted, it seemed with more lengthiness than usual, the never-omitted family prayers.

These over, mother and son were again alone.

Alas! there are worse things than sorrow—worse things, God pity us! than

even death. Roderick thought involuntarily of that other mother and child; the poor girl arranging the flowers he had brought upon the dear, dead bosom, where she had rested all her life, in utmost sympathy of feeling, most perfect and unbroken tenderness, and there smote him, almost like a blow, the bitter fact that kindred blood and external bonds do not constitute internal union. How was he to make his mother understand, in the smallest degree, what he felt, what he desired? That great gulf, which opens sometimes between brother and sister, parent and child—even between husband and wife, though it would have been hard to make him believe that, poor fellow!—had opened—nay, had long been open—

between this mother and son. It was neither's fault, but it was there.

"Well, my dear," said Mrs. Jardine, with a rather impressive yawn, "I suppose we had better go to bed."

"Not just this minute, mother," entreated Roderick. "Let me have half-a-dozen words with you, if you are not too tired. Remember, I start to-morrow for Neuchâtel."

"Neuchâtel! — to-morrow! What in the world do you mean?"

"I told you that, immediately after the wedding, I meant to go back to Switzerland."

"Why? What for?"

Roderick paused a moment. "To see Mademoiselle Jardine, and ask her to

become my wife. She is alone and unprotected, and, if she does me the honour to accept me, I think it will be best to arrange our marriage with as little delay as possible."

He said this in as quiet and matter-of-fact a way as he could: perhaps this very quietness only excited his mother the more. She started up, her florid face literally scarlet.

"Are you mad? How dare you stand there and deliberately tell me such a thing!"

"I merely repeat what I have before told you, both in my letters and when we were talking together the other day. You were not particularly kind to me then, but I thought you were busy and wor-

ried, and that you hardly took the matter in."

"I did not—I couldn't believe any son of mine would be such—such a downright fool!"

"Well, granted that I am a fool, or you think so," returned he, still speaking quietly under the tight rein which he had resolved to put upon himself. "But I myself think I could not have done a wiser thing. So would you, if you only saw *her*. Will you see her?" And with a sudden impulse he threw himself, like a boy, at his mother's knees. "If I bring her to you at once, poor motherless girl that she is! will you receive her and be a mother to her? She would be like a daughter unto you."

"Thank you. What, she would get married, and she in deep mournings! Or else come here without being married, with you as her travelling companion! A nice sort of young lady she must be, that such an idea could ever enter her head—or yours!"

Roderick could have knocked his own head against the wall in utter vexation.

"You are right, mother, I am a fool. Of course she would never consent to either plan. But there is a medium course. If we were once engaged, which abroad is a tie almost as binding and as public as marriage, she could come, under escort of some friend—Madame Reynier, perhaps—and stay with you until her

mourning is over and we could be married."

"All very fine! But what would your sisters say? What would our friends say? That I had taken a foreign girl—a girl without a halfpenny, and a governess besides—who had been foisted upon me against my will; taken her and kept her in my house—me, a respectable woman—till I could make her my son's wife. Why, all Richerden would laugh at me! They would say I had gone clean daft; that, instead of helping on such a marriage, I ought to have set my face against it—prevented it."

"How?" said Roderick, with an ominous flash of the eye. But again he controlled himself. Open contest—that terri-

ble internecine war which families, like nations, should defer to the last limit of possible endurance—was a thing from which his tender and sensitive nature shrank inexpressibly. He could only live in an atmosphere of peace.

"Mother," he said, "do not be hard and unjust to me."

"Unjust! Was I ever unjust to you? Have I not been the best, the kindest, the most good-natured mother alive? Have you not always had your own way in everything?"

"That is true, mother," he said, with a sigh. "Perhaps it would have been all the better for me if I had not 'had my own way in everything.' But now, when it is an honest way—a right way—oh, if

you only saw her! How could I help loving her? Nobody could. And I must have married some time, you know."

"But not now: not when I am left quite alone, all the rest gone. Oh, what trials we poor mothers have to bear!"

"I did not suppose Bella's marriage was a trial. You always seemed delighted at it."

"So I was; so I am. But then it was a respectable marriage. Everybody knew all about it. If you, now, had chosen a nice Richerden girl, with some money perhaps—you'll not have much of your own, not till I'm dead, laddie; and even then I may do as I like with my own, I suppose. Take care!"

And she shrewdly glanced aside at him, watching the effect of this chance arrow. But it fell pointless; Roderick was too simple to take the matter in. All his life pounds, shillings, and pence had been the farthest from his thought; he had always had enough for his own wants—never very great, for he was not personally luxurious; beyond that he wasted no thought as to how large his income was, or in what it consisted. He left all these things to his mother, whom he used laughingly to call, as his father had done, the best "man of business" in the family.

"But, mother," he answered, calmly passing over all else, "I did not wish a Richerden girl, and I don't care for

money; you know that. I prefer a quiet life, in the country if possible."

"What! would you forsake me entirely? I couldn't have believed it of you! O Rody, my boy, my only son!"

She may have been exaggerating her feelings a little, in order to work upon his: still there was a ring of natural pathos in her voice which took the poor fellow by storm.

"Mother dearest!" he sat down by her and affectionately clasped her hand, "who talks of forsaking? Not I, certainly. You are not going to lose your son, but only to gain another daughter—and such a daughter! If you only once saw her! Will you see her? Will you come back

with me to Switzerland and let us fetch her home together?"

He was not wise, not tactful, certainly, this poor Roderick. Alas! a large nature, judging a smaller one, often makes egregious mistakes.

Mrs. Jardine drew herself up with indignant pride and outraged decorum.

"Well, I do think that is the coolest and most impudent proposal——"

"Impudent!" (She had pronounced it "impident," poor woman! which made it a still more obnoxious word.) Roderick looked his mother full in the face. Though she was his mother, he was a Jardine, and she was not; wrath sat better on him than on her; because, if hereditary blood teaches nothing more, it usually

teaches that self-restraint which we are accustomed to call good breeding. "Impudence, I think, has never been a vice of our family; and the lady I have chosen, being of that family, deserves entire respect—which I shall exact for her from everybody, including my own mother. Also, excuse me, I shall resent any insult offered to her, even if offered by my own relations, exactly as if it had been an insult to myself."

He spoke so quietly, and with such stately courtesy, the steel armour of perfect politeness, that Mrs. Jardine was frightened. The boy was his father's own son, only with stronger health, a firmer will, a spirit unbroken, and above all the talisman of hope in his bosom—hope and

love. As he stood there, he looked so handsome in his fearless youth—fearless, yet offering no obnoxious front to anyone—gifted with that best of courage, the power of self-control,—that his mother's heart misgave her a little.

"Wait till next day: we will talk it all over to-morrow. I am so tired to-night." And she nervously took up her bed-room candle, which was waiting beside her.

Roderick lit it for her, and then kissed the hand into which he gave it.

"Dear mother, I am grieved to vex you, believe that; and I will wait a day—two or three days even—rather than go against your will. Think better of what you have said; think better of

me. Do you not believe I love you?"

"It doesn't look very like it," said she, sharply. To natures like hers, gentleness sometimes seems like a confession of weakness, and only rouses them to greater tyranny. "However, do as you say: wait a few days and I'll think over it."

"Very well."

The concession was given with a heavy sigh, and accepted without the slightest recognition of how much it cost. Still the storm had passed by, as so many domestic thunderstorms do, without any special bolt having fallen anywhere; and the mother and son parted with a good-night kiss in apparent friendliness, but with, oh! what a world between them! That desert world, which neither foot is

able to cross to some meeting point of union, though both sides may wearily make the attempt—which always, or almost always, fails.

Life, with its perpetual growth, its constant change, brings many sad alienations, but the most hopeless of all are between those whom nature has formed in such totally diverse moulds that by no possibility can they understand one another, though they have been brought together in some close bond, which becomes at last an actual bondage. Yet it must be endured till death; and perhaps in God's good providence this inevitable endurance is the highest form of education which He gives, or permits, to the human soul.

After his mother quitted him, Roderick pondered sadly over himself and his fortunes for a long time. Passionately in love as he was, he was not selfishly in love. He could throw himself out of himself so as to see a little on the other side. It *was* hard for his mother, who loved authority and was jealous of affection, to be dethroned in this way. And he wished—was it disloyalty to his beloved?—that things had happened differently—that she had been some one whom his mother knew and liked, rather than a complete stranger. But all that was past now. His choice was made—this or none; for, with the impulsive conviction of youth, he was quite certain that if he did not marry Silence Jardine he would never marry anybody.

His mother must make up her mind to accept the inevitable.

Still he would wait; a few days did not matter so very much, with a whole lifetime of happiness before him. Surely, surely it was before him, and not a mere phantom of his own brain? Surely she, so deeply beloved, must have felt that it was so. Her sweet, firm, yet tremulous "yes" must have implied her belief in him, which a little delay would never shake, but only confirm.

He decided to write, not to her—such a thing he knew was impossible—but to M. Reynier; a brief business letter, saying that he was detained by his affairs, affairs connected with the little "inheritance" of mademoiselle his cousin, to whom he hoped

to bring shortly the fullest and most satisfactory tidings. And he implored immediate tidings of her and of the kind "famille Reynier," to whom, he added, he should ever feel himself bound by ties of the warmest gratitude. A sweet letter it was, and withal a manly, though he wrote it in his very best and politest French, almost smiling to think what his mother would have thought of it, or of the simple, gentle, ultra-polite old man to whom it was addressed. And he went out and posted it himself, in the middle of the night, that not an hour should be lost ere it reached Neuchâtel.

Then, with an easier mind, and a heart almost happy—so strong is hope at his age—he walked back a street's length in

the pelting rain, humming to himself his favourite ditty—

"Whenever she comes, she shall find me ready
To do her homage, my queen—my queen."

CHAPTER II.

Mother and Son at Home.

"WELL, mother, and when are we to have that little talk you promised me now nearly two weeks ago?"

"About what, my dear?"

"Surely you remember?"

A vexed look, passing like a shadow across the round, good-tempered face, showed that Mrs. Jardine did remember, though she would have been glad enough

to pretend she did not, and to shirk the question.

"What, that entanglement of yours with the little Swiss girl? Oh, she has forgotten you by this time, depend upon it; and I was in hopes you had forgotten her."

"That was not likely. And I must beg of you not to call it 'an entanglement.' What I have to speak to you about is the very serious question of my marriage. You promised to consider it. I have waited, not merely a few days, but a whole fortnight, and you have never said a single word to me on the matter, which, you must know, is so very near my heart. It is rather hard, mother."

It was hard; and, to do the young man

justice, he had behaved exceedingly well. Never sulky, never *distrait*, as is the manner of young men in love, he had set his mind steadily to do his best, had been at his mother's beck and call from morning till night, had gone with her wherever she wished, and done whatever she told him to do. He had, indeed, devoted himself to her and all her whims and ways with an earnestness rather pathetic, not from selfish motives, but from a sad inward consciousness that, however this difficulty ended, he could never be as much her son as he had been; never again live in the same house, nor even in the same town, for he was determined to quit Richerden, and begin a quite different life—the unworldly, heavenly life with

her! "My son's my son till he gets him a wife," is a law of nature, inevitable under the best circumstances, but never painless; and Roderick's tender heart was so alive to this fact that it made him especially anxious to soften things to his mother as much as he could, before the change which he felt was coming.

But now her total silence, and the silence at Neuchâtel—for Monsieur Reynier had never answered his letter—made him desperate. The more so as he was an idler at home all day, without the staff of regular business work to sustain him. Richerden life—such as is generated in most mercantile communities where wealth, suddenly earned, results in a superficial veneering of luxury, not refinement—had

always been distasteful to him; now it became positively obnoxious. How he hated that perpetual "worriting" over trivial outside things, instead of the large and calm simplicity which, let levellers say what they will, is oftenest found in people of good birth and education. A duke will ride in a second-class carriage, and a duchess come down to breakfast in a linsey gown, with a composure that would astonish your *exigeant* parvenu, who thinks his dignity compromised by anything short of the most splendid equipage, most sumptuous of eating and drinking, and most magnificent of clothes. Roderick Jardine was no duke, only a gentleman, by nature as well as birth—for nature's gentlemen are born in all classes;

but somehow he always felt himself at Richerden like a fish out of water; and now it seemed as if another week of these dreary, idle forenoons, and duller evenings, doing civility to a tableful of heavily eating, more heavily drinking men, and over-dressed, under-educated women, would nearly drive him mad.

Doubtless he judged harshly, and with the intolerance of youth. He did not see the under side of things—the anxious daily toil which inclined the men to enjoy to the uttermost their good things of this life, so hardly earned. He knew not the endless cares of the many kind and motherly hearts which beat warmly under those brilliant gowns. Just now Roderick was altogether "off the straight," and

disposed to make no allowances for anybody. He could endure, certainly; but even endurance has an end, and it had come now.

"Mother," he said, sitting down by her and taking her hand—it was a wet afternoon, and she had just sent the carriage away—"you promised to think it over—this matter so very near my heart. Have you done so? Will you give me your approval, and let me take your love and blessing with me to—to Neuchâtel?"

"And why? What may be your business at Neuchâtel?"

He turned bitterly away. "Mother, do you think I am a stone, that you try me so? You understand quite well, though you pretend to misunderstand. You know

I am going to Neuchâtel to ask Mademoiselle Jardine to marry me."

"And then?"

A shrewd question, and pertinent; for, lover-like, man-like, he had not thought of anything that was to happen afterwards, neither his means of keeping a wife, nor the home he was to bring her to. His one idea was to secure the girl he loved for his own, to marry her, and then—*vogue la galère!* Winds and waves come to all men; no man is half a man who dares not slip anchor and face them bravely, with love in his heart and prudence at his helm. Still——

"And then?" repeated the mother.

"Then, I suppose, we shall be married."

"Might I inquire, what do you intend to marry upon?"

This question, hard and dry, was put after a whole minute's pause, during which mother and son faced one another, and recognized, perhaps for the first time, that each had the same strong will—an inherited quality, which, like others of the kind, often make a struggle between parent and child so difficult and painful, because each is a reflection of the other. In this one only thing Roderick was liker his mother than his father. As they stood looking at one another, both felt that the contest, if contest there should arise, would not be a mere passage of arms, but actual war—war to the knife.

Roderick spoke at last, very quietly,

after his habit; he was growing terribly quiet now.

"I have not considered the question of my income; but it keeps me, and is doubtless enough to keep a wife. You pay it so regularly that it is you who can best inform me its precise amount, and whence I draw it; for I should like, naturally, from this time to be as independent as possible."

"So you shall be, never fear, and much good may your independence do you! Roderick Jardine, since you will be such a fool, hear first what you have to look to. When I married your father, except that tumble-down place, Blackhall, he had not a halfpenny. I was daft to marry him, I know that; but I was young, and I was

fond of him." Her voice trembled a little. "However, that's all past; and he was a good man, and a kind husband to me—always let me do as I liked with my own. For everything was my own, and is still, and I will do as I like with it; mind that."

"Of course; who wishes to hinder you, mother?" said Roderick, gently; for the loud tongue was growing louder and the red face redder. Self-restraint, he knew, was not one of his mother's characteristics —perhaps that was why he had been obliged to learn it himself.

"My money is my own" ("my ain," she pronounced it, dropping, as she always did in excitement, into the speech of her youth). "If ye vex me, and marry

against my will, lad, ye may do the best ye can with that wretched hole, Blackhall; go and starve in the musty old rooms among the mice and rats, as I daresay your father would have liked to do; but ye'll get naething out o' me. I hae thousands—hundreds of thousands—to spend, and to leave; but, though you're my ain, only son, marry that woman, and I'll neither gi'e ye, nor leave ye, ae bawbee."

She thought she had overwhelmed him, crushed him; but he stood there, without any visible change in him, except a certain loftiness of carriage and brightness of eye.

"Don't let us quarrel over money-matters, mother. As you say, do as you

like with your own. If I have Blackhall, I shall be quite satisfied, and so will she."

"Then you mean to brave me, insult me, and marry her?"

"Not to insult you. But I certainly mean to marry her—if I can."

"With or without my consent?"

Roderick waited a minute, and then answered, in a very low tone, "Yes."

"Lad, lad! have ye gone clean daft? Do ye really mean what ye say?" For, apparently, until now, ever accustomed to entire and unquestioned authority, she had refused to believe him in earnest.

"I usually do mean what I say, mother, though I never say much—it is no use," Roderick answered, with a sigh. "What

I asked of you was not money—you may give me much or little, or none, just as you choose—but your consent to my marriage, which you refuse. Why? Give me your reasons."

Mrs. Jardine hesitated, probably because she really had no reason to give, except the common one to people of her temperament, "I've said it, and I'll stick to it."

"What reasons can you have?" pursued Roderick, speaking very gently. "You have never seen the young lady —you can have no personal feeling about her, one way or other. She is well-born and bred, and remarkably well-educated. The only exceptions you can possibly take against her are, that she is, as I

told you, not pretty," and he smiled—"well, mother, that is my concern—and that she has no fortune. If I could, I would have obviated that last difficulty by making over Blackhall to her at once, but I find I cannot, as it is entailed upon heirs male. The small sum, in ready money, left me by Cousin Silence, I shall settle upon her immediately, whether she is ever my wife or not, and glad am I that it should go to another Silence Jardine."

"It may go to the de'il for all I care," cried Mrs. Jardine, violently. "Do the best you can with your own, for nothing shall you ever get of mine. It's my duty to prevent your doing a mad thing, if I can. All your sisters say so, and your

brothers-in-law, and indeed every friend to whom I have mentioned the matter."

"You have mentioned the matter then?" said Roderick, turning very pale. "While I kept dead silence, and asked the same of you, you have been talking over me and my affairs with all your acquaintances. Thank you. That was indeed being a wise mother, and a kindly."

Frightened at his tone and manner, Mrs. Jardine tried to eat her words. "No, indeed, Rody. I would think shame to do that. I have told nobody—at least, almost nobody."

"Except my three sisters and their husbands, and the two or three particular friends to whom they have told it. Doubtless the whole of Richerden knows

it perfectly by this time—that is, the version that you have given of it. Very well. So much the better for me. You have made my way quite clear, mother. Mademoiselle Jardine shall not be talked about, or compromised in any way. I have made up my mind now."

"And what might it be?—if your mother may presume to ask?"

"I shall go back to Switzerland, marry my cousin, if I can, and present her here as soon as possible as my wife. If she will not marry me, I—I shall never come home at all."

"Nae fear o' that. She'll tak' ye, lad; she'll jump at ye if she thinks you've got the siller."

"Mother"—Roderick spoke beneath his

breath, in a white heat of suppressed passion—"mother, how dare you say such things to me? If there is a creature in the world that ought to be sacred to a woman, it is that other woman whom her son loves."

For a moment, Mrs. Jardine seemed startled—even touched. She looked at her son, the son who seemed to have grown so suddenly old—nay, so suddenly wise, in his assertion of his manhood and its rights. His air was so manly, too; quiet, brave, and strong; and the strange beauty of his face—not merely handsomeness, but beauty, spiritual almost as a woman's—shone in it clearer than ever. A son for any mother to be proud of! And she was proud of him:

yet she was about to lose him, perhaps for ever. It was too hard; the pain of it almost drove her wild.

"That other woman, as you call her, is nothing to me. You chose her without my knowledge, and you say you will marry her with or without my consent. Do it. But from that day I will never set eyes upon either her or you."

"Be it so," Roderick sprang up in irrepressible passion, and paced the room once, twice, then stopped opposite her. "You didn't really mean what you said? Mother—oh! mother." The appeal was almost like a cry, but in vain.

"I did mean it, and I do."

And there came into Mrs. Jardine's face a look such as in all his days Roderick had

never before seen there. It reminded him of his grandfather; the clever, hard old man, who, by that mingled cleverness and hardness, had raised himself from the very dregs of the people, and died a millionaire, well respected, though little loved; of whom it was said that he never forgot a friend or forgave an enemy.

"Then, mother, it is no use our talking together any more. Good-bye."

"Good-bye."

Roderick held out his hand, but she did not take it. His voice was tender, sad—nay, almost broken-hearted; but hers was cold as a stone.

"By good-bye I do not imply that I am going away at once," said he, clinging un-

consciously to some last hope. "It will take a few days to arrange my affairs. Shall I stay on here, or would you prefer my leaving the house?"

"Stay on here. It looks more respectable."

"You are right. And perhaps"—with a bitter accent—"that we may at least do things as you suggest, 'respectably,' you will be kind enough not to talk any more of me or my affairs, at least till I have left Richerden."

"Very well. The sooner you go the better."

"I know that."

And, seeing her rise to leave the room, he rose too and opened the door for her, with a sad gentleness which showed more

plainly than ever the gulf which had opened between them—opened, perhaps, never to be closed more.

For five days they went on in the same way, keeping up a sort of piteous politeness before servants and guests, but otherwise never exchanging a word, and never meeting except at meals. Sometimes Roderick felt this state of things so dreadful that he would fain have fled from it; but to fly seemed such arrant cowardice; and besides, his strong sense of duty urged him to endure to the uttermost before he took the final step of throwing off parental authority, even though it were unjust authority.

"Yes," said the family lawyer, who, apparently knowing everything, had sent

for him and talked to him on the subject, as did his two married sisters. Indeed, the poor fellow, who himself kept absolute silence, was talked to—or worse, talked at—from morning till night by different members of his family, as if he had been the one black sheep therein, whom all were trying to lure back from his errant ways. "Yes, my dear sir," said the old man, "I own Mrs. Jardine has her prejudices. And she has a strong will, too; and you have thwarted it—which no woman likes. But then, remember, she has money."

At which Roderick, who had otherwise replied nothing, howsoever or by whomsoever he was talked to, answered passionately, "I do remember. But I must now

endeavour to forget it—and her. I have seen enough of riches and the curse of them. Now I am going to try poverty."

"Poor boy!" said the lawyer, half aside.

"My father's son can afford to be poor," continued Roderick, proudly. "And my father's argument to me was always, 'Do a thing because it is right;' never 'Do it because I choose you to do it.' I think it right—the very highest right—to marry the woman I love, who is also the best woman I ever knew, and I mean to do it. I am ashamed," added he, "thus to bring up the name of a young lady who is still ignorant of my hopes concerning her: but I am forced to it. And now, will you explain exactly how my affairs stand?"

It was with some difficulty that he took

in the explanation, for Roderick's education had been so utterly unbusiness-like that he had no notion of the sad mysteries of £ *s. d.* But he understood thus much, that his income would be greatly diminished, and that he would have to live entirely at that "old tumble-down place," Blackhall.

"*She* will not mind that," said he, smiling.

And the vision of her in her cheerful poverty—alas! he had never seen any but the cheerful side of it—with her strong common sense and practical ways, gave him a soothing sense of comfort, a dim foreshadowing of what his life would be when she was that "help-meet" which a man should always seek in a woman.

Happy if he find her neither idol nor slave, but equal friend, bearer, glad and proud, of half his burdens; not only guided by him, but sometimes guiding him, too, on the right, the prudent, the holy way.

"I'll try to keep right," Roderick said to himself. "I'll try to hold my own, and yet do nothing wrong to anybody if I can help it. But, oh! it's hard to bear. I don't think I can bear it much longer alone."

And he might not, for his nature was very tender, and it was a single-handed battle against every creature that belonged to him, had any of them, especially his mother, said to him a single kind word!

But nobody did say it; not even on the last night, which they knew was his last —that he would never again sleep under his mother's roof. He had told her so, yet she had a dinner-party that evening, at which she sat opposite to him, wearing her diamonds, and beaming all over with those exuberant spirits which always rose to the highest pitch whenever Mrs. Jardine was dispensing her magnificent hospitalities.

Perhaps she wanted to make him feel all he was throwing away, the things she prized so highly: perhaps she did not really believe he would have the heart to renounce them. It seemed to Roderick that never had his mother looked so radiant, so happy, as on that night—the

night which she must have known was their last together, and which she had signalized by giving, as he overheard her triumphantly telling one of her guests, "the very biggest dinner that ever was given in Richerden."

It ended at last, and the mother and son stood alone together, as many a time before, in the drawing-room, or rather in the dining-room, the "banquet-hall deserted," where, with a curious mixture of economy which ran like a thread through her lavish luxury, she was examining into and locking up the remains of the wine.

"Good night, mother," holding out his hand, which she did not take—she had not taken it nor offered him the slightest caress for five days. "Good night and

good-bye; for I shall be away before you are up to-morrow morning."

"Away! Where to? Oh! I remember." She laughed contemptuously. "No, no, laddie; you're not such a fool!"

"Better be a fool than a knave, as I should be, if I forsook my cousin, an orphan without a penny in the world, because my mother has a prejudice against her." He spoke bitterly, but immediately checked himself. "Mother, I am neither fool nor knave, but an honest man; and I act honestly and openly in telling you what I mean to do. I shall marry Mademoiselle Jardine, if she will take me. If not, I will be a good cousin and friend to her; and help her all that I can."

"With your large income, which of

course you will tell her of beforehand."

"I shall tell her everything, and then even you cannot accuse her of making a mercenary marriage. Oh, mother, mother!" —the tears rushed to his eyes and almost choked his voice—"why are you so hard to me? I want none of your money—do whatever you like with it—but I want your blessing, your love. Why can't you love me as you used to do?" (Mrs. Jardine turned round, half mollified.) "Only, you must love her as well."

"Never! Never as long as I live."

Without another word, Mrs. Jardine gathered up her velvet skirts and sailed out of the room, slamming the door after her.

Perhaps her son was weak; perhaps he

ought to have followed her—persuaded her—come to some definite conclusion with her. But he had a natural horror of "scenes;" struggles from which her rugged and yet easy temperament came out triumphant—nay, refreshed; while he, cast in finer and gentler mould, felt their effects for hours afterwards. Perhaps, too, having said he was going next morning, he should have gone; but he did not go.

Mrs. Jardine must have guessed or known this, for, when she came down and found him in the breakfast-room, she made no remark, only slightly smiled. And no conversation passed between the mother and son except upon the boiling of the eggs.

After breakfast, she went about her customary business, or pleasure, in her customary manner, even saying to the servants in his presence, "to have Mr. Roderick's dinner all ready for him at seven o'clock, as she should be absent till nine."

"You forget, mother," he said, "I shall be absent too. I must leave to-night."

"Stuff and nonsense! I'll believe it when I see it."

These were her last words, loud and angry, as she went out of the room. For long and long he tried hard to forget them and her face, as she looked then——alas! that ever a son should wish to forget his mother's face!—but he never could. They haunted him all through

that cruel day, when he busied himself with putting his things together—very helplessly, for he was one of those men who can do little for themselves, and always instinctively rest on a woman's care; through the solitary night, when, alone in the railway carriage, he tried to collect his thoughts and could hardly believe that he had left his mother's roof for ever.

But so it was. Thus, in the most common-place way, without any tragic scene, if that is not the deepest tragedy of which there is no outward sign—thus, alas! had been broken a tie which, when perfect, is the most perfect and the closest in all this world; and even when imperfect, as in this case, has in it a depth and tender-

ness which is scarcely fully felt until it is broken.

Though his conscience could accuse him of nothing; though he had done all that mortal man could be expected to do, in the piteous crisis in which he found himself; and though now, safe and free, he felt himself sweeping on across land and sea towards the desire of his heart, with a firm hope, even more than hope, of winning and possessing, still, for many, many hours, there could scarcely be found a more miserable man than Roderick Jardine.

CHAPTER III.

Found.

HUMAN nature is human nature, and all people, even parents, must get what they earn. Had Roderick's mother bade him go through fire and water for her sake, explaining the why and wherefore, he would have done it; he was one of those who never shrink from doing anything, for duty or for love. But when she insisted upon blind obedience, giving no reasons, listening to no explanations,

merely asserting her own imperious will, "I say it, therefore it must be," backing her words by the power of punishing which fortune had laid in her hands, then her authority failed; as such tyranny ever must fail, save with cowards and time-servers.

Roderick stayed a day in London, at an hotel, the address of which he had carefully written out and left upon Mrs. Jardine's dressing-table, waiting vaguely in the hope of some blessed telegram that might change his miserable journey into a happy one. Then he started; and, when he found himself drifting away from Dover pier under the cold clear winter stars, he felt as if he had cut the cable of his old life for ever.

Now, whatever happened, he was at least free: free from Richerden and all its intolerable shams, its burdensome luxuries and thinly disguised vulgarities. How he hated them all; and, in his passionate youth, how harshly he judged them all! Now, he thought, he could carve out a life for himself—a life of useful, honourable toil, simplicity, and peace: such as his father had often talked to him about, wherein the new generation should carry out all that the old had lost.

"Oh, father, father!" Roderick looked up to the winter stars under which they two had walked together so many an hour, and which still seemed a strong bond of union, a kind of memorial witness between the living and the dead. "Father, I am

glad you are dead and know nothing of all this. Or else that you know everything, which I almost believe you do."

And the solemn nearness of the dead, contrasted with the sad far-off-ness of the living, comforted him, in a way by which such natures are comforted, and other and different natures cannot in the least understand.

By-and-by, as the gleaming circle of Dover lights receded, and mile after mile of stormy sea rose up between him and England, Roderick began to look forward, not backward. Who would not, at his age, with a passionate first love thrilling every nerve, and wakening every power of brain, heart, and soul? Once in his life, some one says, every man becomes a

poet. Then, too, almost every man becomes a hero, capable of the bravest acts, the noblest self-denials.

If anyone had seen Roderick now, they would have seen a boy no more, but a man. The very expression of his face had changed. Its softness and dreaminess were gone; there was firmness in the mouth and fire in the eyes; the strength to do and to dare, which comes to all generous souls when it is not alone themselves that they have to think of, had entered his heart.

"I *will* have her," he said to himself, for the thousandth time, and kept pondering over every possible way in which he was to tell her so; to woo her down, Diana-like, from her blue heaven of saintly

peace, and make her stoop to become a mortal wife. And, alas! a poor man's wife. But that, he felt, was his best chance. Roderick Jardine, with unquestioned thousands a year to lay at her feet, would, to a girl like Silence, be infinitely less dear than Roderick Jardine—just himself—asking her to love and comfort him, to help him and work with him, to take her fair share in the burden of life, the best lightening of which would be that it was borne together.

That she could bear it, he had not the shadow of a doubt. In those six weeks—no, two months—of constant association, he had seen more of her than nine men out of ten ever see of the woman they choose as a life-companion; choose her

out of ball-rooms, croquet-grounds, pic-nic parties, a mere Elle-maid, as he had once laughingly said to his mother. But this was a real woman, strong as gentle, human and loving,

> "And yet a spirit still, and bright,
> And something of an angel light."

"Ay, even though, as I told my mother, she is 'not pretty,'" laughed he to himself, as he recalled with a thrill of passionate remembrance the soft grey dress (alas! forgetting it was black now), the slender figure, the clustering light curls, and the whole simple sweetness of that vision of perfect womanhood, now for ever before his mental eye. Was it wonderful if all his Richerden life, the sharp voices and unkind looks, the atmosphere of sham

elegance and real coarseness, that strange mixture of extravagance and meanness, of worldliness and religion, or rather religiousness, in which he had been brought up, faded away from his memory; and he thought only of the other atmosphere into which fate had driven him, where a certain heavenly influence seemed to make hard things easy, and sad things sweet, to bring peace in the midst of poverty, and love and calmness through deepest sorrow—sorrow, which led the way to joy. The joy that was approaching, even though it was the mere bliss of being near her, of being able to help her, as a man helps a woman, and a woman rejoices in that sweet dependence, filled his whole being: coming

nearer and nearer with every lessening mile.

By the time he reached Pontarlier the strong tension had changed this hope almost into a fear. What might not have happened during the weeks that had passed since he heard anything of her? She might have been ill—dying; but, no! he had a certain trust in the good Reyniers, and in the silent freemasonry between himself and Sophie. No misfortune could have come, or he would have known it.

Nevertheless, as he swept along through the Val de Travers, as once before—only then it was in morning sunshine, and now in the chill shadows of early dawn—a great solemnity came over him.

The bare trees, the silent snow-topped crags of the ravine, seemed a warning that all things come to an end, even youth and love. Only, will the young ever believe this? Or rather, why should they? Because, though in a sense it is true, in another it is utterly, divinely false. When he came out above Neuchâtel and saw the eternal Alps still standing in their place, the long wavy line of snowy white above the deep blue lake, Roderick felt, by an intuition beyond all reasoning, as he had felt the first day when he looked into her eyes—a stranger's eyes—at Berne. And again at Lausanne, when they talked together of love until death—ay, and after. For, when two who have loved one another see life drawing to an end, does

there not come a mysterious sense of a new life just beginning, a life of absolute and heavenly union, of which human marriage, when perfect, is the nearest type? Strange how, even now, in the fulness of youth and strength, Roderick's imagination leaped forward fearlessly to the time when, every charm faded, he should clasp in his arms the one woman he had loved—the woman who had loved him, and him only; whom, whatever they might be to the world, this divine unity of love made each to the other eternally young.

Reaching the hotel, after his long night's journey, the familiar faces and the bright Swiss welcome warmed his heart. It was Sunday morning—during that

miserable week he had almost lost count of days—and all the good people of Neuchâtel were gone to church: doubtless also the Reynier family. Still he could not rest. He thought he would just go and see the outside of the house, perhaps hear she was well, and then hover about for a glimpse of her, till he could speak to the professor, her nominal protector, and ask permission, after the fashion of the country, formally to offer his hand. For he was determined no respect, no decorum, should be wanting in anything he did, down to the commonest outside *convenances*, towards the woman he adored.

His hand almost shook as he rang the bell of Professor Reynier's door—for

after all he could not pass it—and his voice failed, and his disused French seemed to fly away from him, when he faced the little *bonne*, who at once recognizing him, and breaking out into the most courteous of smiles, showed him in quite like "un ami de la famille."

They were all well—they would return from church immediately—Monsieur must allow himself to wait—her master would be charmed to see him. Would Monsieur repose himself in the salon? No one was there, she believed.

And for the first moment he believed so too, and sat down, looking tenderly round on the familiar room—the Paradise where his Eve had appeared to him that first night—making ever afterwards the whole

world new. The dear, silent, empty room! Empty? no! something stirred in a recess; some person, sitting there reading, rose with a slow, listless air, came forward, suddenly stopped.

The slender figure, the black dress, the fair, clustering curls—Roderick started up. The whole thing was so sudden, so unexpected, that there was no time for any disguises on either side. Besides, both were so young; and it is in later life that love learns concealment. As they stood, these two young creatures, face to face, and quite alone, no human power could have concealed the joy of both.

Roderick advanced a step. "Me voici! je suis revenu," was all he said, speaking in French, as seemed most natural.

"Oui, oui, oui!" and, with a glad cry, Silence clasped her hands, the first impulsive gesture he had ever seen her use; "oui, il est revenu!"

The minute afterwards—he knew not how; in truth, neither ever did know—he felt her in his arms, gathered close to his breast, sheltering and sheltered there as if it were her natural refuge. He did not kiss her—he dared not; but he touched her soft hair as it lay on his shoulder; he pressed her, all shaking with sobs, to his breast; he called her by her name—first, "ma cousine," and, then, "Silence." An instant more, and putting her a little apart from him, so that he could look down into her eyes, he breathed, rather than spoke,

another word—an English word—"My wife."

Silence shrank back for one moment, trembling violently, drooped her face, all scarlet, and then lifted it up with a strange pathos of entreaty, almost appeal, as if she had but him in the whole world.

"Your mother," he whispered—"your mother knew it all."

"Then—yes!"

Roderick drew her back again, close into his very heart, and pressed his lips upon hers. In that long, silent, solemn troth-plight the two became one—for ever.

CHAPTER IV.

Betrothed.

WHAT a change, sudden as wonderful, unto Roderick, as unto any human being with a heart, a soul, and a conscience!—to pass from the lonely, selfish, or at least self-absorbed existence of idle youth, useless and aimless, into the double life, with all its duties strongly and clearly defined, which everyone takes, and ought to take, upon himself or herself, after that great crisis "engaged to

be married,"—when both cease to be sufficient to themselves and each becomes the right of the other; man and woman together forming the complete being, as is the holy law of marriage. And however some, having fallen short of it, may doubt, disbelieve, or even deride it, still this holy law remains the same, and still unbroken, open for every new generation to strive after; the ideal—possible, and sometimes attained—of true love and perfect marriage. Few find it maybe; but if found——

Roderick felt that he had found it. When, for the first time in his life, thank God! he clasped a woman to his breast, the one beloved woman who to him was all the world; when, gazing deep down into

her eyes, he saw reflected there a heaven of pure love—the love that seemed to look beyond himself and into heaven—there came to him a great calmness. He was satisfied. He felt himself no longer solitary, restless, drifting hither and thither as fancy or feeling led. His life now had a distinct purpose, an unquestioned duty. He had taken the helm in his hand, and was ready to sail away across any seas, known or unknown, if only he had her beside him—his friend, companion, helpmate, wife.

"My wife!" He said the word over and over to himself, with a strangely solemn tenderness, as he walked home to his hotel that night, after such a happy Sunday. Ay, though the wind blew and

the rain fell, all day long, outside the little window alcove where he and his betrothed were left to sit and talk. For, immediately on the family's return from church, he had asked for an interview with M. Reynier, and explained everything, while Silence did the same to Madame Reynier and the girls. There had been due congratulations, both formal and tearful, from the simple affectionate Swiss household, and then the thing was an accepted fact; the young people were *fiancés* and treated as such, according to the fashion of the country, which holds the bond almost as sacred as that between husband and wife.

His wife! Yes! heart and soul took in the dear new word, only a few hours old,

and felt that it was making a new man of him. Not the mere selfish rapture of attaining his prize, but the deep, peaceful joy of being the one object of a woman's love; of holding her happiness in his keeping; of having taken root, so to speak, and given himself the chance of growing into a goodly tree for the shelter of many, instead of floating, floating, mere driftwood, down the remorseless river of life, which hurries us all away so fast. He might have many cares, many sorrows, but he had, and would ever have, the one sheet-anchor of life, pure and righteous love. For though he had chosen suddenly, and almost by instinct, he felt that he had chosen righteously, neither rashly nor blindly, and that he need not be afraid.

Nay, with her beside him, it seemed to Roderick as if in the whole wide world there was now nothing to fear.

After that Sunday, that day of days, came eight or ten days more, slipping peacefully by: he preferred to let them slip. First, because on that very night he had again written to his mother; a long, tender letter, explaining exactly how things stood with him, and entreating her once more to reconsider the question, and let him give her blessing to his bride, without ever having told, or having had need to tell, poor Silence that she came into the family unwelcome and unblessed. Waiting the answer to this last earnest appeal, he rested on the delicious present, in the

new life, wonderful as new, which had opened before him.

Something else had opened too, unlocked by that betrothal kiss, the sweet, pure maidenly soul, so reticent by nature, that otherwise it might have remained for ever "a spring shut up, a fountain sealed."

"If you had not loved me," she said to him one day, "I think I should never have loved any man alive. Now it seems all so natural, so right, so sweet." And she laid her head down on his shoulder. "Oh, if my mother knew how safe and happy I am! how you will take care of me always! But, also—I think I shall take care of you."

"Yes, my darling."

For, well as he had thought he knew her, until she was really his own he never guessed what depths of tenderness lay hid in her—tenderness rather than passion. She was not a girl who would have died for love, or done wrong for love; but that she could love, through good and ill, through joy and sorrow, with a tenacity of fidelity that few, even among women, are capable of, her betrothed read in her eyes. And amidst all the passion of his youth it was a sort of balance-weight—this steady calm of hers—making them in a sense each the complement of the other, as in marriage it should be; diverse but not opposing elements, welded together in one harmonious whole.

A week went by, and still he heard

nothing, had told her nothing, of his own people, except briefly answering her innocent questions, that his mother was quite well and his sister married. But each day he felt that the time was come when he must tell her. Nay, her quick-sighted love was already piercing through the generous hypocrisy he was practising —beginning to read his face, as women always read the one face that they love, and to find out that he was not quite happy, not even beside her.

"I am sure there is something on your mind, my friend" (she often called him by that innocent translation of "mon ami," being still shy of saying "Roderick"). "Could you not tell me? You mean to tell me everything, do you not?"

"Yes, my love—my love of loves! the one human being to whom I can tell everything," said he, passionately, as he pressed her hand against his heart.

They were walking arm-in-arm up and down the cemetery, their favourite promenade, strange and *triste* as it was, the Reyniers thought. These two did not think so; not even though a few steps from them was the new little mound, with the white cross at the head of it, which Roderick had already caused to be erected, marking the mother's soon-to-be-forsaken grave. "But she will not mind—you will not mind," he had said, in gently hinting this possibility as a reason for completing everything. "If the dead can know anything, she knows

that I think of her and of my father together, and that I will take care of you and cherish you—so help me God!—as long as He keeps me in this world."

They were rather a singular pair of lovers, not given to much sentimental demonstration; rather more like old married people. They would sit together hour by hour, he reading, she sewing; troubling nobody; seeming to want nothing but the mere bliss of being together. At least, it was evidently so with her; and when he looked at her calm, sweet face, so full of innocent peace, Roderick, with a deep pang, pressed all his own troubles deep down into his heart, thanking God that he had a man's strength

to bear them all—bear them, if needs be, for two.

This might have gone on still longer, he shrank so from the cruel task of giving pain to his innocent darling, had it not been for a letter which came one morning, the very morning when he took her to look at the new white cross, and she had asked him to "tell her everything." He had told her a good deal; how the repairs were progressing at Blackhall—not restorations, only needful repairs; which he had left in charge of Mr. Black, the factor—desiring that nothing might be altered which was not absolutely necessary. But in reading the letter to Silence, he had omitted the P.S., which ran thus:—

"I saw Mrs. Jardine this morning. She was quite well; and looked exceedingly well. She had let her house for the winter, and was just starting on a round of visits in England. She bade me tell you she had received your last letter, and there was 'no answer.'"

Then she was inexorable, this woman who called herself a mother. As Roderick stood beside the grave of the dead mother here and thought of his own, he could almost have forgotten his manhood and burst into an agony of childish tears.

But he did not; he controlled himself, thinking how best he could break to Silence, whose only idea of motherhood was perfect love, perfect trust, the fact

that there were other mothers—shall I say God forgive them, or only God pity them?—who could act differently; yet, perhaps, acting not unconscientiously according to their several lights.

Roderick tried to think so; with his whole heart he tried: in true filial duty abstaining from harsh judgment, and saying to himself, "It is because we are so different that she cannot understand." Still, still——

"What are you thinking about? Is there anything in the letter that vexes you? or anything that you have not read to me?" She spoke in her pretty broken English; she always talked English with him now; and she looked him straight in the face with her innocent eyes. "I

shall not mind your not telling me everything, if you say distinctly, 'I have reasons. I would rather not.' But still I think it would be better—better for us both, if you did tell me."

"You are right," he answered, with an almost convulsive clasp of the hand which lay on his arm, which she returned. It was one of the touching peculiarities of her that now she was betrothed she never seemed the least shy or ashamed of loving him, of identifying herself with him, and of belonging to him, and him alone, without an atom of coquetry, or exactingness, or doubt. That delight in teazing, in showing their power, which so many girls —really generous and good girls—have with their lovers, was in Silence Jardine

altogether absent. She simply loved him, nothing more.

"Now tell me, what is it!" she said. "It will not hurt me. Nothing can hurt me now, except so far as it hurts you. Tell me."

So he told her, as briefly and tenderly as he could, without compromising the truth. He attributed Mrs. Jardine's objections to his marriage chiefly to her vexation that his bride was of another country and had no *dot*. Of the family riches, or his own, he said as little as possible; and, in truth, Silence did not seem to take in that phase of the subject, or be affected thereby. The one thing which struck her—and, put it as carefully as he would, it could not fail to strike

her like a heavy blow—was the fact that he was marrying her without his mother's consent, and hopeless of ever winning it.

"We never do that here," she said, faintly. "It is, I think, impossible, illegal."

"It is not so in our free England," Roderick answered, passionately. "No injustice, even of parents, is allowed to blight our lives. After a man is twenty-one, or a woman either, both can walk out of their parents' door and in at any church-door and be married in face of all the world, which is a right and righteous thing——"

"Hush!" she whispered; and he saw that her face was white, and the touch of

her poor little hand deadly cold. "We will not talk any more of this to-day. To-morrow."

"But we must talk of it, my dearest," cried Roderick.

Seized with sudden apprehension, he almost wished for the moment that he had used deceit, or at least concealment—given some vague reasons, easily credited by her who so innocently believed everything, for his mother's silence, and so married her, not letting her guess the whole sad truth till she was married, and it was too late to retract. But second thoughts recalled him to himself, and he knew that he had acted rightly; that a generous woman, deceived in any point before marriage, may afterwards forgive,

but to forget, never! Any deception, then, strikes the key-note struck by wise Shakespeare when he makes Desdemona's father say bitterly—

> "Look to her, Moor! if thou hast eyes to see:
> She has deceived her father, and may thee."

"Love, my own love!" pleaded Roderick, "you will not be angry with me for daring to tell you the whole truth. Do not cast me off! My mother has done it, you see. I have now not a soul to make a home for me, to take care of me, to keep me right. No, I don't mean that exactly. I am not quite such a coward as to compel the girl I love to marry me by saying I shall be ruined if she does not. You make me good; but your forsaking

me should not make me bad," added he, proudly.

She smiled, a proud smile too.

"No, I am not afraid of that."

"But you will not forsake me? My darling, we are two lonely creatures. Let us cast our lots together, and let us do it as soon as possible!"

Silence started, all the blood rushing to her face.

"Oh! no, no. Think of this," touching her black dress; adding, with a cruel sob, "Mother, my mother, you loved him so! And *his* mother rejects me, will not have me for her child." Then, seeing the misery in her lover's face, she suddenly brightened, with a tender, fitful brightness, like the sun through a shower.

"My poor Roderick! my dear Roderick! We are very unhappy, both of us; but we will try to bear our pain together. I will think all this over. You must let me think it over quietly, and not expect me to say anything, one way or other, for this night at least. We will part now. Do not walk home with me. Come and see me to-morrow morning."

"Not walk home with you! Not see you till to-morrow morning!"

In the smothered passion of his voice, the agonized entreaty of his eyes, Silence must have seen, have felt, how dear she was to him: that dearness and nearness which, when a woman once finds out, her own heart re-echoing the truth, and teaching her to believe it, is a heaven of

happiness never lost—no, not even in the supremest anguish of separation, or the final parting of death.

"Roderick," she whispered, putting her cold little hands in his; they stood together in the shelter of the cemetery wall; the early December dusk had already fallen, and there was not a creature near. "My Roderick, kiss me—kiss and forgive!"

He kissed her—that sacrament of the lips which only faintly expresses the union, through life and after, of soul to soul; and both were comforted and at peace. Nevertheless, in walking home together, they scarcely spoke a single word.

Reaching the Reyniers' door, Roderick

did not offer to enter; in truth, he felt that the usual social evening would be as impossible to him as to Silence. In their present crisis of pain they needed either to be quite alone with each other, or entirely apart.

So he parted from her, lingeringly and tenderly, and spent the whole evening and best part of the night in writing home, arranging, with his masculine ignorance, everything he could think of domestically, concerning the repairs at Blackhall. Failing their completion, he began to consider whether he could not, just till the winter's end, take a furnished house in Richerden. His mother being absent, would make this no objectionable thing; on the contrary, there would be a certain proud, indignant

pleasure in bringing his bride home to his native place, and presenting her boldly to all his friends—even his sisters, supposing they were amenable to reason and common sense. They had each homes of their own, and honest, sensible husbands besides; it is generally the women, not the men, who make and fan family "differences."

Should his sisters fail, being still much under the influence of the strong, capable mother, ten times cleverer than any of her daughters—well! he would then show them, would be glad of an opportunity of showing, that he was not the "boy" they thought him, but a man capable of acting for himself, and not ashamed of anything, least of all of his marriage and his wife.

"Whatever I am, I am at least no coward," thought Roderick to himself, as he braced his quivering nerves, and choked down the tears that would spring, woman-like, to his eyes, when he thought of the forlorn home-coming that might be, instead of the triumphant bringing home of the bride. "No matter, she will be mine then—she is mine now—and I will defend her and uphold her to my last breath."

CHAPTER V.

Hold or Lose.

SPITE of all his courage overnight, when Roderick saw his betrothed next morning, looking deadly pale, but assuming a faint smile of welcome, and sitting down beside him in the old way, though, he noticed, with a slight hesitation, as if doing as a duty what had before been so natural and sweet, his heart sank. He waited in a fever of apprehension for what she had to say, or rather he tried to

prevent her saying it by talking about what he had been writing in the matter of Blackhall. To all of which she answered only by a pale smile, then said, gently—

"You forget, my friend, the matter we had to speak about to-day."

"No, I do not forget—but yesterday, when I spoke of our marriage, it seemed to pain you."

"It will not, to-day, for I have been thinking it all over, and——"

"You are trembling! You are ill, my darling!"

"Oh, no!" gently putting aside, and then yielding to his tender caress. "Don't mind me, I am not ill; but I lay awake the whole of last night, and it is

trying when the morning breaks upon one and there is no rest, no division between two days—two such dreadful days."

"Dreadful! Why? What do you mean?"

Silence recovered herself. It was wonderful the power she had, that little gentle thing, of restraining emotion and speaking calmly. To him, born with a temperament in which every nerve was sympathetically alive, quick to joy and equally so to pain, this quality in her was a rest inexpressible.

She took his hand and stroked it with a gesture almost motherly.

"Listen to me. I have a good deal to say, and you must listen. You will? I

shall not hurt you, my Roderick—not very much! And that I love you—ah, you know it—only too well, if that were possible. But it is impossible! Were you a vain man, or a tyrant, or selfish, it might harm you, and I should be afraid; but you are none of the three. You are Roderick, my Roderick! I shall never love any man in this world but you!"

"Of course not; it would be very wrong." But suddenly his attempt at a smile faded in a vague terror. "Why tell me this? What do you mean?"

"Hush! Listen to a little story which struck me very much when I was a young girl, and I thought of it again last night. Our canton, you know, is Protestant, but there were in the village two young *fiancés*,

both Catholics. He took a fancy to turn monk——"

"What an idiot!"

"Never mind that. I do not argue the point; he did it for conscience sake. He was a good man. One day he came and told her they could never be married, that he did not think it right to marry."

"Faugh! And the girl—what did she do?"

"What do you think she ought to have done?" Then hastily, as if to prevent an answer, "She said to him—it was she herself who told me—'Mon bien-aimé, if you think it right, I am content. You will never marry, nor shall I; therefore we belong to one another still. And you

loved me, you will always love me; that is enough!' It was. They are alive still, I believe. He is a priest, and she a Sœur de la Charité. We Protestants thought it strange and wrong, but she never blamed him. Her answer to everybody was, 'He thought it right!' and 'He loved me!' Poor Clotilde! I could not understand her then: I can now."

"Why?" asked Roderick, trembling.

"Do you not see, my friend? The cases are scarcely quite equal, but there is a likeness, enough to show me my duty."

"Your duty! What is it? What do you mean?"

"I think"—she spoke very slowly, and softly—"I think we ought to part."

For the moment, Roderick was completely stunned. Her whole manner was so quiet that a stranger might have imagined she felt nothing, that she had no feelings at all. A slight quiver about the mouth, a tighter compression of the fingers—she had taken her hands away from his, and clasped them together on her lap—that was all. Shallow people might have wholly misjudged her; even her lover did, a little.

"And—you say this—quite calmly—as if you did not care!"

"Not care! Oh, mon Dieu! mon Dieu!"

It was not said in the light French way of using the Great Name, but in the agonized appeal that we all make instinct-

ively in moments of acute anguish to One above all, the only One who knows all and can understand all.

Then she turned imploringly to Roderick.

"Do not be angry with me, I do not deserve it; only listen, it is for your good I speak. Yesterday I believed—you made me believe—that it would be the best thing in the world for you to marry me. Now I doubt."

"Why?"

"Can you not see? It costs you so much—far, far too much: loss of fortune, though money is a small thing, comparatively; loss of your mother, and her love. Oh! it would break my heart if, through me, you were to lose your mother."

"I have already lost her; or rather since I could so lose her, I could never have had her really," said Roderick, with great bitterness. He might have said more, but was checked by the sweet amazement in Silence's face. "You cannot understand, my dearest. My mother and I were never like you and your mother; it was a totally different thing."

"Still you were mother and son. She loved you."

"Yes, she loved me," said Roderick, turning away his head to hide the spasm of pain. He had such a tender heart—too tender for a man, some would have said. But the woman who loved him did not say so. Only, with the wonder-

ful instinct of love, she leaped to conclusions which made her feel that she must harden herself, to save him. It was the sole way.

"Do not let us talk of my mother," Roderick continued. "Love is shown in actions, not words. There comes a time when a man is no longer in leading-strings; he must judge and act for himself. If he acts conscientiously and openly, his parents ought to respect him, whether they like it or not. My father would have done so. Oh, Silence, how my father would have loved you!"

"Perhaps he does love me," said she, with the soft, far-away look peculiar to her, and so seldom seen, except in the eyes of little children. "Perhaps it is

that which helps me. Something, or somebody, must have helped me, or, I think, I should have died last night."

"My poor love!"

Silence turned round suddenly, clasped him round the neck, and, hiding her face on his shoulder, wept as if her heart would break, then suddenly dried her tears.

"Now it is over. I have made up my mind—that is, so far as, being *fiancée*, I have a right to make up my mind. I think it would be best for you to go home at once, and tell your mother that we have parted, that we thought it best to part."

Roderick sat, dead silent.

"Otherwise, think what will happen!

You will be comparatively poor——"

"And you are afraid of poverty?"

The moment he had said the words he felt their meanness, their utter untrueness, and passionately begged her pardon.

"What need?" Silence answered, half sadly. "The question is not whether you hurt me, or I you, or whether we vex one another, but whether we do what is right, absolute right. That is the real heart of love. If I thought a thing right, I would do it, and help you to do it, though it killed me—ay, even though it killed us both."

And, as she spoke, her voice never faltered, though her face was white to the lips. Roderick felt a strange sense of

awe, and yet peace, for he saw in her the woman he had dreamed of, the sort of woman that a weak man fears, a selfish man scoffs at, but a thoroughly noble man recognizes as his noblest self, ready to be at all times, and under all circumstances, his strength and consolation.

"I understand you," he said, with a quietness that was a marvel even to himself. "But it is a very difficult matter to decide, and we must decide, for our whole two lives hang in the balance. Let me go away, and think it out alone—quite alone."

He rose, with a grave, sad air, and went to the door, then came back and kissed her hand.

"My love! my only love! Yes, I have

found you. It is not every man's lot so to find. Whatever happens, I thank God."

Without more words he went away to his favourite "thinking-place," a quiet walk along the lake-shore. Many an hour had he spent there within the last few months, but never such an hour as this.

He was at the age when life is at full spring-tide with most men, when self-restraint, or even the power of seeing aught besides themselves and their own will, is rare to all. One or two good Swiss folk who passed "ce monsieur Anglais," already well known in the little town, and who thought that he must have an extraordinary fondness for pedestrian-

ism, and a great indifference to weather, little suspected that in him was then raging the battle fought in every young life, the St. George and the Dragon combat which, soon or late, must be gone through.

Even Silence had fought it; fought it, poor child! alone, in the dead of night—was fighting it now, though when Sophie came in gaily and asked where her renegade knight had vanished, leaving her all alone, she only replied that "she had sent him out for a walk; he would be back presently."

Yes, he would come back, with the fiat of life or death in his hands. Byron, who wrote so many false things, wrote one true one—

"Man's love is of man's life a thing apart,
'Tis woman's whole existence."

At least, this is true of most women; and she of whom it is not true is scarcely a woman at all.

Though all the time Sophie sat chatting beside her, Silence neither wept nor complained, asked no sympathy, and betrayed by no word that anything was amiss, still, when the door opened and she saw her lover appear, a shiver ran through her, which made the kind-hearted Sophie, with a troubled and anxious look, immediately disappear.

So once more they were alone together, these two young creatures, learning so early their hard lesson, and trying so painfully to learn it well, to do the right

and fear nothing. Alas! a lesson never ended for us all, our whole life long. Will it, in the next life, end—or only begin again?

But with these two it was this world, this life, still; their lot was in their own hands, and they knew it. Clearly, Roderick knew it. As he came and stood before his betrothed, the boyish irresolution sometimes visible in him was altogether gone. All the man, strong, true, tender, shone in his loving eyes.

Silence saw this at a glance, and the light came back to her own; but still she did not attempt to speak. And when Roderick sat down beside her, instead of the usual fond, half-involuntary, shy approach, the instinct of shelter and pro-

tection, she sat motionless, as if determined by no winning look or word to sway her lover into any resolve that was not absolutely his own act and deed.

He too—there was that in him which makes tenderness all the sweeter—even passion only the most passionate, because of its self-restraint.

"My love," he said, "I have been thinking over everything; trying to see the right and wrong of things—simple right and wrong, without relation to ourselves at all. My father could do it, and used to say he believed I could when I was tried. I hope so; I hope I can judge calmly, without being either selfish or unjust. Am I?"

"No! a thousand times no."

"Well, then, if you can rely on me—and I think you may—the case stands thus. How far, and for how long, ought the parent's will to be an absolute law to the children? and how much of their happiness, or what they believe to be such, ought children to sacrifice to their parents?"

"A great deal, oh! Roderick, a great deal. Think, if my mother were alive—or your father."

"Yes, but——" he did not say what he was going to say, that there are parents—and parents: concerning whom God only, and perhaps the children themselves, can know the difference. "My father is dead, or all would have been well. As to my mother, if she had any good reason to

prevent my marrying, if mine were a rash, disgraceful, or even an imprudent choice, or if I had deceived her in any way, she would have a right to be angry. But she has none. I am making an honest, honourable, creditable marriage. I can perfectly well afford to marry; even if I lose everything else, my father's property will keep us from want; and I am young, I can work. You, too—oh, my darling! if my mother knew what you are! But she ought to have known; she ought, in commonest justice to you and to me, to have taken some pains to find out."

Silence said nothing.

"That is, I feel, the cruelest wrong of all," Roderick went on. "To say to a son, 'You shall not marry,' offering no

reasons except 'Because I do not wish it,' is as unjust as another thing which parents sometimes do—give young people like you and me every opportunity of meeting, every chance of loving one another, and then turn round and say, 'Nobody expected this, and it must not be.' I say it must be, it ought to be, or it ought to have been prevented in time. But here I am, arguing—arguing; what a pity my mother did not make me a barrister! It shows, anyhow, that I can judge the matter calmly, even though it concerns myself."

Still, under all his arguments, there was visible a great agitation, a vague dread.

"Perhaps when I am an old man—

when we are both old people, my Silence—I may view the question differently. But I think not, I hope not. I hope I shall always believe as I do now, that right, absolute right, is the first thing in life—but, oh! love is the second. My best and dearest! the one woman in the world to me! it all comes to this: I cannot, will not part from you; I should not be doing right if I did part from you."

He extended his arms, and for the moment Silence looked as if she would have flung herself into that dear refuge—she, alone, motherless, poor—but she did not. She held aloof—would not even let him take her hand.

"Stay a little. Roderick, you are very dear to me—dear as my own soul; but I

could part from you, this minute, and for ever, if I thought it right."

"Could you?" he looked at her for an instant. "Yes, I know you could."

"And, above all, if I thought it good for you. Perhaps it might be good for you. You are young, you are ambitious, you will lose a great deal by marrying. Besides, you will be poor. For mé, it does not matter; but you—can you bear it?"

"I will try," he said, smiling.

"But that is not the worst. The worst is—oh, my friend, have you considered?—that I cost you your mother. She will never love me, and she loves you. Suppose you should one day reproach me for having lost you your mother?"

"Never, while I have my wife."

At that word, spoken in English, though they had been talking in French, which Silence still dropped into occasionally, her face grew all rose-colour—a pure celestial rose, like the sun-set Alps.

"My wife," Roderick continued. "I must have you. I cannot do without you. My mother does not understand—some people never do. Some people think one love is as good as another; and perhaps it is, to them—but to us? I am yours, you are mine. What use is it to tell us we must not be married, when in our hearts we are already married? You believe that?"

"Yes," she said, and no more. Then, after a pause, "I believe in you so abso-

lutely, so entirely, that I think if, instead of deciding thus, you had told me that our marriage could not be; that there were strong, clear, righteous reasons why I should never be more to you than I am now, I should have said, like that poor Clotilde, 'It is all right; I am content.'"

"But would it have been right? And would you have been content?"

She lifted up to him her pathetic eyes. "I would have tried to be. I will be now, if you only say the word; if there is in your mind the slightest doubt, the slightest hesitation. It is not so hard, not so very hard, since you love me. If I had never known that, perhaps it might have been. Not now."

Roderick was silent.

"Is it to be, then, my friend? We are to part; but we are always to remain friends? And you will always love me —never anyone else but me? At least, I know I shall never love anyone but you."

"Oh, my darling!"

The strong curb which both had put upon themselves was gradually giving way. Human nature, or rather that divine instinct which rules and guides the strong passions of humanity, bringing them at last into the desired haven, the deep peace which comes, and only comes, when two, who have deliberately chosen one another, righteously belong to one another for life—human nature would have its way.

"My darling, we *must* love one another —we *must* be married. You left it to me to decide, and I have decided. It will be a pang in some ways, a risk in others—but it must be; it ought to be. Love is best. Come!"

He took her two hands to draw her to him. At that touch of his—soft, strong, and firm—the sort of clasp which implies, besides will and passion, the deep tenderness that includes both, and makes a woman safe for ever—all the girl's soul seemed to yield to him, the man who was now master of her fate. She looked him straight in the eyes—her one love who loved her.

"I would have lived," she cried—"yes, I would have lived! One has no right to

break one's heart and die till God chooses. But life with you, and life without you—oh, the difference !"

Roderick clasped her in his arms, and they wept together like little children.

CHAPTER VI.

Outward Bound.

AFTER that day there was no reserve of any kind between these two, who had determined to cast their lot together, and "sink or swim," as Roderick said with a smile, which showed how little he believed in the sinking. He was very unworldly in many things: ignorant too; often a great deal more ignorant than she, in all practical matters. As he showed when urging their immediate marriage,

without thought of to-morrow, or the day after to-morrow, or indeed of any earthly thing, except the eagerness to get safe possession of his treasure, and be sure that no evil fate could snatch it from him.

But Silence said no. She would not consent to be married until at any rate the first few months of her mourning had passed by; besides, with the customary pride of Swiss girls, she wished to earn her own trousseau, and not come to her husband quite empty-handed. Therefore she insisted on continuing her music-teaching, and paying her board to the Reynier family, and living as independent, busy, and practical a life as if she were not going to be married at all. Her

"insistance" was, however, accomplished in no obnoxious or violent fashion, but merely a quiet way she had of doing for herself that which she felt to be right, without interfering with other people.

So Roderick, constrained by the gentle force of circumstances, took a leaf out of her book, as he declared, and began to work too—establishing himself at a pension in the town, and joining various classes, so as to pursue certain definite studies, and fill up a few blanks in an education which, out of the lazy *laisser-faire* of prosperous fortunes, had been, even at Cambridge, a good deal neglected.

"But I shall neglect nothing now, you will see," he said to Silence. "I was a

boy six months ago; you have made a man of me."

And she? Girlish as she looked still, you could see in her face that she was a girl no more. Grave, quiet, often almost sad, from that day when they decided to be married against every obstacle, she took in all things the serious, womanly part, assuming with love's joy all its inevitable pain. The half-motherly relation which almost every woman, however young, comes to take towards the man she loves, watching him, guarding him, cherishing him, Silence now assumed to the full, yet after a fashion so sweet, so unobtrusive, that the proudest man could not be offended.

"I wonder what makes you take so

much trouble over me?" he said one day, when she had been suggesting a warmer coat, or some other trifle, the sweet trifles that show a man how a woman cares for him. "You are always thinking of me, dear."

"Because you never think of yourself," Silence answered, smiling. "Besides, I love you!"

That was the secret and its cause. She loved him as such a woman never loves twice in a life-time, and not even once, unless the object deserves it. Did Roderick? A question he asked himself sometimes, in the strange humility which had of late come over him; but, when he put it to his betrothed, she laid her hand on his mouth and told him "time would show."

They had to trust to time for the unveiling of many a dark thing. Once again Roderick wrote to his mother, informing her that he had delayed his marriage for three months, hoping against hope that, after all, it might not be that saddest of weddings, without a parent's blessing, but that, whether or not, it must be. He allowed her no possibility of believing that he could change his mind. While opposing, he never deceived her, for deceit is always cowardice, and, whatever he was, Roderick was no coward.

So he worked on, and Silence worked on, seldom seeing each other during the day, but in the long winter evenings meeting under shelter of the Reyniers' kindly roof, and "taking sweet counsel together,"

like lovers who are also friends, and who feel in one another's company the delicious repose, the unspeakable comfort, of a sympathy which long survives passion, and lasts till the very end of life.

Their life was only at its beginning, yet the sadness of things made them prematurely grave, even when, coming to the conclusion that they must wait no longer, and that it was vain to hope for the letter which never came, Roderick pressed his young *fiancée* to name their marriage-day.

It was on one Sunday afternoon which they were spending with the good Reyniers at Chaumont. They had climbed the hill through the long pine-woods, and were now standing watching that lovely view,

the triple chain of lakes, with its long line of snowy Alps beyond. The air was mild and soft; there were violets in the woods. It felt like the first day of spring, which always comes, as it were, with a message of promise to the young. Ay, and even to those whose youth is only a never-fulfilled remembrance.

"Silence," Roderick said, as he took in his the hand that would be his own through life, "I have finished all the work I had to do here. Now, when shall we go home?"

"Home?"

"Your new home, and mine; the home we are to share together."

Startled, she faltered out something about "waiting a little longer."

"I have waited. It is now nearly nine months since that day at Berne, when—

"'I did but see her passing by,
And yet I love her till I die.'"

"That would have been very foolish," said Silence, with a naïve gravity; "unless, indeed, you had followed up the acquaintance, and come to know me well." Then, suddenly putting her two hands in her lover's—"You do know me, faults and all, so take me; and, oh! be good to me. I have only you."

"And I you. You will be good to me also?"

She smiled. "Little use in talking, but I think there will never come a day when I would not cheerfully die, if my dying could help you. My living

will, much more. So I mean to live."

And she looked up fondly, with all her soul in her eyes, at her young bridegroom. Would she, forty, fifty years hence, see in the old man's face that of this lover of her youth, the face forgotten by all but her? God knows! but it is good to believe so.

Ay, we elders may reason and preach, say that "calf" love is all nonsense, and early marriage most imprudent, that young people should part and forget, and a broken heart is soon healed—every new generation gives the lie to that doctrine. True, hundreds fall in love and "get over it;" yet, now and then, there is such a thing as a lost love, and a lost life. Life with love, and life without it

—that is, as Silence had once said, all the difference. But what a difference! For any parent who needlessly causes it, out of whim, or worldliness, or anything except righteousness and justice, I can only say, as was said of those who wilfully offend "one of these little ones," "It were better that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and he were cast into the depth of the sea."

The marriage was arranged, of course, to be quite quiet. All the usual Swiss festivities, the *soirée aux bouquets* before the wedding, and the ball after it, were of necessity omitted. The Reynier family alone were to "assist" at the ceremony, when, the girls implored, Silence would for one day only put off her mourning

and assume proper bridal white. She assented, "because my mother would have liked it. She used often to talk of the day when she would dress me as a bride."

As usual, the day before the religious was the civil marriage; that curious ceremony, when a few words spoken in an upper chamber in the Hôtel de Ville, before a rather dense official, with only Monsieur Reynier and Sophie standing by as witnesses, made Roderick and Silence Jardine man and wife. The afternoon of that day, so strangely un-English and informal, was spent by them in walking up and down their favourite alley, and planting violets over the grave beside it —the mother's solitary grave. Solitary, but not sad, not even to the daughter

who was leaving it, for the love remained, the love which had lasted to the end.

"And she would be glad, so glad! if she knew that you were taking care of me," said Silence, with a bright smile, though her tears were dropping down. "Also a little, that I was taking care of you. She used to say it was my *métier* always to take care of somebody. Therefore, adieu, my mother! You will not forget me, wherever you are; nor I you."

She laid her cheek on the white headstone in a passion of sobs, then suddenly checked them all, gave her hand to her bridegroom, and suffered him to lead her away home.

He did not see her again till eleven next morning, when Sophie, Marie, and Jeanne Reynier led into the salon and left beside him, shutting the door upon them both, the whitest, loveliest vision! More like an angel than a woman, he thought then, nor ever ceased to think, though he never saw it but once in his life, on that wonderful wet morning, when the Deluge itself seemed to have come back upon Neuchâtel, as if to sweep away with its torrents all his old life, and begin the new life with his wedding-day. The rain beat in loud storms on the window behind her, yet there she stood, this white angel, in her thin, flowing veil, like a cloud, and her crown of orange blossoms, and her downcast eyes. His own—was

it possible she would be his own!—a mortal woman, and his wife?

Suddenly he stooped and kissed, not her lips, but her hand. She looked surprised for an instant, perhaps, just a little hurt, then perceived at once the deep emotion, the tender reverence.

"O my love, my love for ever! Thank God!" said she, or rather breathed than said it, as she put both her arms round his neck and clung to his bosom. She was but a woman after all.

Soon after, Roderick led his bride, both quite calm now and smiling, to the two carriages waiting below. He and she and the good Reyniers drove through the soaking streets to the damp, empty church, where, strange contrast to his

sister's brilliant marriage, they two stood alone, with not a creature of their own blood beside them, and heard the old minister in his unimpassioned voice address them as "mon cher frère et ma chère sœur," recommending them to observe "une inviolable fidelité, une entière confiance, et une affection toujours plus profonde." Then, having answered the few questions of the Swiss marriage liturgy, simple and Protestant, not unlike his native Presbyterian service, the young bridegroom listened as if in a dream to the final blessing.

"Que Dieu, notre Père en Jésus-Christ, fasse reposer Sa bénédiction sur vous, qu'Il scelle dans vos cœurs le lien que vous venez de former, qu'Il le sanctifie

de plus en plus, et que vous viviez ensemble en Jésus-Christ, dans l'attente du jour où ceux qui se seront aimés en Lui, seront réunis dans Son sein pour l'éternité. Amen."

Love fixed on the love of God, and which on the very day of earthly union could look forward to the day when, their flesh being mere dust, they should be "re-united in the bosom of God for all eternity"—ay, that was it; that was the true love. Through all the passion of his youth the young man felt this, and blessed God that he did feel it. And, as he turned and kissed his bride (to the great horror of the Demoiselles Reynier, such a thing being quite contrary to the etiquette of Neuchâtel), in spite of the

gloomy church, the pelting rain, the sad, quiet marriage, neglected and unhonoured by kith and kin, it seemed as if all heaven were around and about him, for his was a true love marriage, honourable before men, and sanctified in the sight of God.

CHAPTER VII.

At Home.

"FLAT" at a Richerden terrace, furnished after the true Richerden style, not tawdry certainly, but very solid: solid and ugly. Large-patterned flowery carpets, and curtains to match, or, rather, not to match, there being just that slight difference in shade which some people think "of no consequence," but which to others is a daily torment, setting their teeth on edge like an untidy room,

or a piano out of tune, or any other of those small avoidable miseries which make all the difference between real and sham refinement. But the sense of harmony in colour and form, a thing quite independent of riches, and often attainable in comparative poverty, was mostly unknown to, and disregarded by, the wealthy inhabitants of this excellent town. No blame to them; only a little painful to those who happened to be differently constituted.

"When I look round this room, I feel exactly like a cat with its back rubbed up the wrong way," said Roderick, trying to make a joke of his annoyance at finding the sort of "home" to which he had brought his wife so very different from

what he had desired, or even expected. They had been travelling a month abroad, and had begun to weary of hotels, and look forward eagerly to the settled life of dual solitude, which to all people who are truly "one and one"—without need of that "shadowy third" which marks, alas! the sad imperfectness of married union—is, and ought to be, the most entire felicity.

And felicity it was—even though theirs had been a sad home-coming—not a soul waiting there to welcome the bride. It was now two days since they had arrived, yet not a visit, not a card, not a letter, came to show that anybody remembered there were such people in the world as Roderick Jardine and his young wife.

"We might as well be in the desert of

Sahara, only then it wouldn't rain, as it seems always to do here," continued he. "What a change! We left spring, we have come back to winter."

"I don't mind it. And I like the merry crackle of the open fire," said Silence, who was kneeling before it, the blaze brightening her sweet face, upon which had already come the mysterious look which even a week of marriage seems to bring, the deep, contented calm of a girl who has passed into a woman, whose lot is settled, whose life is filled. For good or ill, God knows! but it is filled; and all uncertainty is ended. "Do not vex yourself, dear," she said. "Though, I allow, it might be a prettier salon, or parlour. Is not parlour the word?"

"Drawing-room; parlour is not half genteel enough for Richerden," said Roderick, laughing.

"Well, whatever it is, it is very comfortable. I am quite happy in it—with you. And I like our being here, all alone, with no 'receptions.' We shall not need to have any, I suppose?"

"No 'at home,' you mean? to receive our wedding-callers? Apparently we shall have none to receive. Oh, there is the door-bell."

The quick, sharp stroke of a Richerden hall-bell—Roderick had started at the long familiar sound, and even changed colour a little. But it was no visitors, only the post.

"Just business—Mr. Maclagan, our

lawyer. He might have written sooner, if only to apologize for finding us such a wretched 'flat' instead of the furnished house I ordered." And Roderick, looking first disappointed, then vexed, was going apparently to tear up the letter, but meeting Silence's eyes, he stopped, and passed it over to her to read. "It is such a comfort to me that I can tell you everything," he said, tenderly. "You are sure never to be vexed, or cross, or hurt—oh, my darling!" If she had been either of the three, that last word, and the tone of it, would have healed all.

Yet the letter, read aloud, was a little hard to bear; for both.

"'Dear sir' (he used to call me dear Mr. Roderick; he has been our man of

business these forty years). 'Perhaps you were not aware that the furnished house you wished me to hire would have swallowed up half your income in mere rent, so I took the liberty of getting something more advisable, which I hope will please you, during the time that Blackhall is being finished. I forwarded the address, as desired, to your three sisters here, and to Mrs. Jardine in England. My wife will do herself the honour of calling on young Mrs. Jardine. I wonder how the old lady will approve of that?'"

"Of my being called Mrs. Jardine, or of Mrs. Maclagan visiting me, does he mean?" said Silence, with her smile of grave simplicity. "It is a pity for the

lady to come, if she fears to displease your mother," added she, with a slight sigh, which went to her husband's very heart.

"The 'lady' indeed!" said he, bitterly. "Oh, my mother does not know her. She does not belong to our set at all. Her calling upon my wife is quite unnecessary, rather a liberty."

"But she means it kindly; and Mr. Maclagan took a deal of trouble for us. If this—'flat,' do you call it?—is not very pretty, it is very convenient; and that is a nice bright little *bonne* he has found for us. She can quite understand me, and I can almost understand her."

"A mere 'flat,' and one servant! What would the girls say?" muttered Rod-

erick. "Yet you are happy, my sweet!"

"Quite happy!" And her face showed this; a tell-tale face, at least to those who loved her, and loving, learned to read it.

Yet it was slightly flushed and nervous when, a few hours after, her first visitor came; the "first foot" in the new home, as that lady rather too ostentatiously pointed out. For it was Mrs. Maclagan, dressed in her very best, loud-voiced, voluble, with a shrill Richerden accent, meaning to be most cordial and most kind, and yet succeeding in making Roderick, who received her with grave politeness, and talked to her as much as possible, so as to shield his wife, wince at every sentence she uttered.

When she was gone, he threw himself in a chair.

"I hope that woman will not come again. She would drive me wild. Better have not a friend in the world than such friends as these."

"Had you many friends here? Is it I who have lost you them?" asked Silence, mournfully, and then looked sorry she had said it. "My husband, I did not mean to regret; and it is too late to suffer you to regret. We cannot alter anything now."

"We would not if we could," cried Roderick, passionately. "We know, if no other human creature does, how happy we are, how entirely we belong to one another."

"Thank God!"

There were tears in the young wife's eyes; but she smiled still. And during the somewhat trying two weeks that followed, when it rained every day, and they were shut up together indoors, with nothing particular to do—a most severe trial even to honeymoon lovers—though she did not always smile, she never once gloomed.

"I know now, I have found that blessing which my father said was the greatest any man could get, a sweet-tempered wife," cried Roderick, fondly, as they stood together at the window, watching the rain sweep down.

"Mamma was that. And papa loved her. I mean, not exactly as you love me,

because he had loved some one else in his youth; she told me that herself, one day. Still he entirely respected and trusted her; they were very happy in their way. But, oh!" She suddenly turned to her husband with such a look in her eyes—a look that none but he had ever seen or would ever see. "My first love, my last love! God is good to have let me marry *you*."

"My darling!" Then, with an attempt to touch lightly upon the unspoken soreness between them, "It is well you like my company still, for, apparently, you will have no other. The weather keeps us in, for I can give you no carriage, and I hate cabs. I have never been used to them; besides, only fancy my wife in a common

street cab! But weather need not have hindered all our 'carriage friends,' as my sisters call them, or my sisters either, from paying you the respect of a visit."

He spoke irritably, as he sometimes did, though never to her. A meaner nature—and there are such, men who esteem even their wives according as the world admires them—might have visited upon Silence this entire and cruel ignoring of her. But upon Roderick it acted in precisely the opposite way. No princess quitting her own people to be received in equal honour by her husband's kith and kin, could have been treated by him with more tender reverence, more watchful love, than was that poor lonely girl, who had no other

refuge or defence than himself in the wide world.

Still he was not quite perfect, and by this time she had of course found it out. But perhaps the very tenderest bit of a woman's heart comes out towards the man she loves when she first discovers she has something to pardon in him—and pardons.

"I am very cross to-day, Silence, and I know it."

"Yes, so do I," she said and smiled. "But, if you know it, it is half conquered. Go and take a good walk, and walk it off, as in the days when you were in love, you know."

"As if those days had ended, or ever would end!" answered Roderick, parting

her hair and looking passionately down into her eyes. "My good angel! But don't you see how much of the devil I have in me still? How do you mean to make me good?"

"I mean us to make one another good," she answered. "My mother used to say" —it was strange and touching this way she had now of speaking of her mother, as if not dead, but only absent somewhere, and still mixed up with all their daily life —"my mother said, it is better to use one's feet or hands than one's tongue, when one is vexed about anything. Therefore go."

Roderick went, and his wife stood watching him down the rainy street with eyes he saw not, and a heart that in its

deepest depths was, even to him, not wholly known—or shown.

"I think, though you had never been mine," she murmured, "so long as you were yourself, I would have loved you just the same. But, since you are mine—oh! my love! my love!"

And the tears, which he seldom or never saw, broke out unrepressed—tears, not of grief, but joy. Soon she dried them, and, looking round for something to do, began putting away his gloves that he had left on the table, and an old coat which she had made him change for a warmer one. As she did so, she kissed them both, saying over again, with a tender murmur—"My love! my love!"

A foolish girl, may be! And she had

been only married six weeks. But, as she said, it would be just the same, did he remain the same, even after they had been married fifty years. A happy love, a happy life! In which, being fitted each for each, either grows more and more into the other, through youth, middle age, old age—realizing the rare but not impossible married union, of being "not two, but one flesh."

Roderick came back in quite a cheerful mood.

"My walk has done me good, spite of the rain. And I have actually found a friend—Tom Grierson, lately married too. He and his wife are going to the coast the day after to-morrow, but they insist upon 'making up a party' (that is the phrase,

love) for us to-morrow. She will call first, and invite you with due ceremony. And you shall wear your wedding dress, and the diamonds Cousin Silence left to my future wife. Little she thought it would be to another Silence Jardine! You will look so charming, and I shall be so proud. We must go."

"Must we?"

With the quick intuition, the instinctive thought-reading, learnt by those who deeply love, and only those, Roderick detected at once the slight hesitation.

"Is it this?" he said, with a glance at her black dress. "Do you very much dislike going?"

"I dislike nothing, if you like it, and it seems pleasant and good to you."

"Thank you, my darling. Yes, this visit will be pleasant, I think: and good also. The Griersons are among what my family" (he rarely named his mother now) "call 'the best people in the place.' Excellent people, too; intelligent, cultivated. I like them, and so will you; old Mrs. Grierson especially."

"Do they know anything? About me, I mean."

"I cannot tell, I did not ask. You see, I could not ask," added Roderick, clouding over. But immediately he drew his wife close, and kissed her fondly. "It does not matter either way. Never mind, love. We will go—and for the rest take our chance. We have done the deed, we are married. No human being can ever part us more."

Still with a curious foreboding of what might happen, after the note of invitation and apology which, to Silence's evident relief, arrived next day, instead of Mrs. Grierson herself, Roderick helped his wife to choose her "braws" for this first appearance in the world—such a different world from the innocent *monde* of Neuchâtel! Then he left her to her toilette, and sat reading, or trying to read, till she appeared.

Not exactly the angelic vision of her marriage morning; "a spirit, yet a woman too." Very womanly, if not very fashionable, for the white dress was high round her throat, and the round soft arms gleamed under a semi-transparent cloud instead of being obtrusively bare.

"I don't know exactly what is the difference," said Roderick, examining her; "you look scarcely like the Richerden brides whom I used to meet, but you look so sweet! I once said to—to them all at home—that you were 'not beautiful,' but I am afraid, my wife, I told what we call here 'a lee.'"

Silence laughed, the happy laugh of one who, being admired by the only person she cares to please, is childishly content and satisfied.

She belonged to that class of beauties who, owing all their charm to expression, only look well when they are happy. A disappointed life might have made her quite an ordinary girl all her days; but now, when leaning on her young hus-

band's arm, she entered the Griersons' drawing-room, there was such a light in her eyes, such a tender glow in her cheeks, and about her whole bearing the quiet dignity, ease, and grace which, to natures like hers, only come with the consciousness of being loved, that very few, regarding her, would have hesitated to exclaim, "What a sweet-looking woman!"

Roderick saw the impression she made, saw indeed, for the first few delightful minutes, nothing else; until, turning suddenly, he perceived, sitting close by, splendidly dressed, and surrounded by quite a little court, his sister Bella, Mrs. Alexander Thomson.

It was a position half painful, half

ludicrous, and yet so extremely difficult, and involving so much, not only as to the present but the future, that he felt actually sick and giddy. One glance, however, at the sweet unconscious face beside him, and another at the very different face opposite, and his mind was made up.

With a bow to his sister, a mere formal bow, as to any other lady, he drew his wife's arm through his, and they passed on to the other end of the room.

Nobody noticed; it is curious how little people do notice, or trouble themselves about their neighbours' affairs, if their too egotistical neighbours could only believe so! Dinner was announced, the host came forward to take down the bride, Roderick

had to go through the same politeness towards Mrs. Grierson, everybody went in to dinner, and soon the waves of society flowed smoothly over this little domestic tragedy, unknown to all, apparently, except the brother and sister; who sat within a few yards of each other, yet never interchanged a word.

It was a regular Richerden dinner, such as both had been familiar with from their youth upwards, but Roderick felt like a ghost re-visiting the well-known scenes. A not unhappy ghost, certainly, in spite of Bella sitting there. Through all the dazzle of lights and clatter of voices (how loud everybody talked, and how sharp and shrill the Richerden accent sounded!) his eager ear listened for the occasional low-

toned words spoken with a slight foreign intonation, and his eye rested tenderly on the fair, calm face of his wife. She was evidently neither shy nor strange, but perfectly dignified and self-possessed. He wondered if Bella saw her.

"My husband seems charmed with your wife: I shall be quite jealous directly," said his hostess. "Where did you find her? She looks different from our Richerden girls. Is she Scotch?"

"Of Scotch family, but Swiss born. We were married in Switzerland. Her father was my father's second cousin, and her name was Silence Jardine. You must have heard it before, Mrs. Grierson."

And Roderick turned to a gentle-looking old lady on his other hand, aunt to the

young couple whom he had told Silence she would be sure to like.

"I remember your father's cousin, Miss Jardine. And your wife is her namesake? What a curious coincidence! But I understood—— However, one never hears quite the truth about love-affairs; so no matter," added the old lady, stopping herself. "All's well that ends well. Happy's the wooing that's not long a-doing."

"Ours was fully six months a-doing," said Roderick, smiling. "We waited as long as possible; on account of her mother's death, and for other reasons; and then we married. A right, and wise, and prudent marriage, as I think a true love-marriage always is," he added, point-

edly, for he felt his sister was listening to every word he said. And he knew that old Mrs. Grierson was one to whom everybody told everything, though even scandal, passing through the alembic of her sweet nature, came out harmless; she was noted for never having been heard to say an ill word of anybody.

"You are right," she answered; and her eyes, placid with long and patiently-borne sorrow—she was a childless widow—rested kindly on the young bride. "By her face, I should say that Mrs. Jardine was one of those rare women who are in the world, but not of it."

"How well you read her! I thought you would," cried Roderick, warmly. "If ever there was a saintly creature born——

But I am her husband, and ought not to speak."

"Who is to speak for us if not our husbands, I should like to know?" said young Mrs. Grierson. "And when there are actually three brides present. By-the-by, Mrs. Thomson, I did not know till a few minutes ago that it was your own sister-in-law I was inviting you to meet; but I shall learn the ins and outs of Richerden people in time. You and your brother must have married within a few weeks of one another."

"No, some months," said Roderick, with his eyes firmly fixed on his plate; Bella, with some smiling word or two, turned back again to her next neighbour, with whom she had been gaily conversing all

dinner-time. So the difficulty passed, seemingly unnoticed by everybody.

How much did "everybody" know? was the question that haunted Roderick. What did his sister mean by coming here, well aware whom she should meet? Was it to blind the eyes of Richerden as to their family quarrels? He knew his mother and sisters would make any sacrifice for the decent, the decorous, the expedient. Or had she come—this resplendent Mrs. Alexander Thomson, who yet wore a dissatisfied expression quite new to the good-tempered rosy face of Bella Jardine—come out of curiosity, defiance, indifference, to meet the brother she had forsaken, and the sister-in-law she ignored?

When the ladies rose, and he was forced to let Silence pass him without a warning or explanatory word, catching only the bright smile which showed she was at ease and happy, because underneath this outside show was the sweet inner reality that they two were everything to one another, Roderick vexed himself with conjectures as to what was happening in the drawing-room, and blamed himself for what now seemed the moral cowardice of letting his young wife drop ignorantly into the very midst of her foes. So absorbed was he with these thoughts that he quite started when a slap on the back roused him to the presence of his new brother-in-law, Mr. Alexander Thomson.

"Didn't see you till this minute. Very odd—my wife never told me we should meet you here. And was that your wife? —the uncommon nice girl that sat beside Grierson? Phew!" with a slight whistle; then confidentially, "The women are always fools, we know. Old lady cuts up rough still? Never mind; what's the odds so long as you're happy? Glad to meet you again, my boy. When are you coming to see us?"

Had it been possible to frame a speech more calculated than another to set every nerve tingling in Roderick's frame, or touch to the quick his pride, his sensitiveness, his strong family feeling, these words of Mr Thomson's would have accomplished it. He had forcibly to say

to himself that they were well-meant, and to shut his eyes in an agony of brotherly pity to the rapidly reddening face, thickening speech, and always coarse manners of the person—you could not say gentleman—whom Bella had chosen to marry, before he could trust himself to reply. Even then it was as briefly as possible.

"Thank you. We have only just arrived at Richerden, and are going on to Blackhall as soon as possible."

"But we shall see you before you go. Bella will be delighted; and if she isn't, I shall; and I hope I'm master in my own house. Depend upon it," dropping his hand heavily on the table, and looking round with a triumphant gleam in his

fishy eyes, "the one thing a husband should try for from the very first, is to be master in his own house."

"If he can be, he will be, without need to say a word about it; and if he can't be, why, it's no good trying."

The laugh went round at this naïve remark of young Grierson's, but Roderick never said a word. And when the gentlemen fell into gentlemen's talk, politics and so on, though he liked it, having been long enough absent from England to feel an interest in all that was going on there, his mind continually wandered not only to the wife whose happiness he knew he made, and felt it was in his power to make, but to the sister who had thrown away her own happiness, and over whose

lot, be it good or ill, he had no longer the smallest influence.

"Poor Bell!" he said to himself, and all his wrath against her died out; he remembered only the days when they two used to play together, merry, innocent brother and sister, sufficient to each other, without thinking of either husbands or wives.

For his wife, when Roderick, at the first excuse possible, joined the ladies, he saw her sitting in a corner, contentedly talking with old Mrs. Grierson. In the further room Mrs. Alexander Thomson, with a group of ladies round her, was holding great state, as lively and laughing as if she had not a care in the world.

Evidently the sisters-in-law had not met

or spoken—nor had anybody noticed the fact; or else, which was much more likely, everybody was quite aware of the fact, but was too civil, or too indifferent, to make remarks about it.

To get quietly away, that was the young husband's first thought, especially as, though she looked and smiled so sweetly, he detected a shade of weariness in the dear face he knew so well. If he could only carry her safely off before the admiring circle round Bella broke up, and before Mr. Alexander Thomson appeared in the drawing-room—as he was sure to do in a condition euphuistically termed "merry." But Mrs. Grierson had first to be spoken to a little, and she sat close beside his sister, whom, in passing, he felt catch his hand.

"Rody!"

Was there ever a man, old or young, who, hearing himself called by a familiar voice the pet name of his childhood, could stonily turn away? Poor Roderick, anything but stony-hearted, certainly could not.

"What do you want with me?" he whispered, pretending to turn over a large volume of photographs which his sister held.

"She—I came here on purpose to look at her—she is much nicer than I expected."

"Thank you. Is that all? Then I will pass on. I was going to say good night to Mrs. Grierson."

The tone, studiously polite, was exactly

what he would have used to any stranger lady. It seemed to cut his sister to the heart.

"Roderick, what can I do? I dare not vex mamma. She holds all my pin-money; and he is—oh, so stingy! so—— If I had but known!"

"You did know; I told you myself," said Roderick, sternly. "But it is useless talking. As one makes one's bed one must lie on it."

"I know that. And you?"

"There is no need to speak—we had better not speak—either of me or mine."

The brother and sister looked one another full in the face. Both were changed, both had taken that momentous step which sometimes breaks the fraternal

relation for ever, but as often draws it nearer, making separation, not division. Perhaps there is no tie more close and tender than that of a brother and sister both happily married, and each taking a sympathetic interest in one another's concerns. But here——

"Stop one moment," Bella said. "Does she know I am here? Would you like me to speak to her?"

"Certainly not."

"Why not?"

"Because my wife is myself, and every rudeness, every unkindness shown to her is the same as to myself, or more than myself. I cannot resent it, seeing it comes from my own flesh and blood, but I can escape it. And I will. There is not

the slightest necessity for you to speak to Mrs. Jardine."

"Mrs. Jardine—how strange! But everything is strange," muttered Bella, almost with tears in her eyes. "However, you will come and see me—just you yourself?"

"What, without my wife? No; not even if my mother asked it. Good night, and—good-bye."

For he saw Silence's eyes watching him—those innocent eyes which he knew followed him wherever he went, with the unexactingness of perfect love. "Once," she had said to him after they were married, "once, I might have been jealous; but now—you may talk, flirt,—is not that your English word?—with any woman

you please. You are *mine*—you love *me;* all else is only an outside thing."

"I must go, Bella; my wife is waiting. Again—good-bye."

"Oh, Rody!" and under shadow of the table she again caught his hand.

At this instant the gentlemen were heard coming up; and one of them, approaching, tapped her on the shoulder, with a jovial, "Well, my dear!"

A shiver of repugnance—almost of fear—passed over poor Bella from head to foot. Well might the sapient Mr. Alexander Thomson observe that "women are fools;" but the greatest of all fools is the woman that marries a fool for his money.

"Jardine! here still? Do introduce

us—my wife and me—to our charming sister-in-law. Or, rather, introduce her to us, if Bella thinks it more proper."

"Yes, yes! bring her here. I beg you will, and quickly. Don't you see everybody is looking at us?" said Bella, hurriedly.

"Let them look; it is nothing to me," said Roderick, and was walking away, when he felt a little hand slipped under his arm.

"I came not to hurry you, dear, but to tell you that Mrs. Grierson offers to take us home in her carriage. She is so kind. I like her so much."

"I knew you would, my darling."

Bella heard the words, saw the look,

and the look which answered it. A sudden spasm, almost like despair, passed across her face—the despair which a woman, any woman, cannot but feel on catching a glimpse of the heaven she has lost or thrown away. But she righted herself speedily; and, having much of her mother's cleverness, slipped out of the difficult position by coming and taking Silence's two hands with an air of frank pleasure.

"You would not carry off my brother this very minute, when I am so delighted to see both him and you? I am Bella. Of course you have heard of Bella? Nay; you must let me kiss you, my dear."

The tone, if a little patronizing, was

kind; and, though the soft cheek turned scarlet, it did not shrink from the kiss. Silence stood, neither shy, nor afraid, nor ashamed, to receive the greeting of her husband's sister. But when Bella's husband came forward, with rough exuberance, to take his share in the salute, she drew back.

"It is not our custom in Switzerland," she said in French to her husband; and, as she extended the tips of her fingers, it would have taken a bolder man than even Mr. Alexander Thomson to offer a kiss to young Mrs. Jardine.

All this little scene passed within half a minute, attracting no attention except from the Griersons, who stood by.

"We are detaining you, and making our

family relations needlessly public," said Roderick; "but the fact is, my wife and sister had never met before. They will meet again shortly, I hope."

"I hope so too," responded Mrs. Grierson, in a tone which showed that the gentle old lady was fully cognizant of the Jardine history, as no doubt, in some form or other, was everybody present, or would be within ten minutes. Indeed, as Roderick took his wife from the room, he felt that, like the celebrated wit in the anecdote, they "left their characters behind them."

What matter? What did anything matter, so long as he held fast that tender hand, which, in the friendly dusk of the carriage, he had taken, for he felt it trem-

bling much. But neither they nor Mrs. Grierson made any save the most ordinary remarks on the way home—that commonplace, ugly "home," which yet was so sweet.

Arrived there, Silence threw her arms round her husband's neck.

"I am so glad, so glad!"

"Glad of what?"

"Of—everything, I think. But most of all to get home."

"What a little home-bird you will grow to! Exactly suited for a poor man's wife. Suppose, now, I had married a fashionable young lady, who wanted to have, every day, a dinner-party, like the one we have left! But you did enjoy it?"

"Oh, yes. Only—— And that was

your sister? Did you know she was to be there?"

Silence spoke with hesitation, even with a slight constraint.

"I did not know, or I should not have gone," said Roderick, decidedly. "But perhaps it is as well. Poor Bella! Did you notice her husband?"

"Yes."

Neither said anything more. Comments and questionings were alike avoided by both, as indeed was their habit on this painful subject. Already they had learned one of the best lessons of married life, that there is a time to talk, a time to be silent. No existence, least of all the double existence which was now theirs, is so entirely without difficulties—no heart

so free from weak points and sore places —as not to recognize this truth. A "fidgety" man, a "worrying" woman, even though both may be good sort of folk, is often more trying to live with than an actual ill-doer. And I have known households overshadowed with endless sorrows from outside, who yet carried within them a perpetual sunshine of cheerfulness and peace.

This peace was in both their faces—the young husband and wife—as they sat down together in their little parlour, nestling into one another's arms, with the sweet and sacred caresses which even a brief separation of "doing the polite" to other folk seemed to make all the sweeter and more sacred. Neither spoke, until at

last Roderick rather sighed than said, "Poor Bella!"

"Was she—was she always like that, and not like you?" asked Silence, after a long pause.

"We were never very much alike, but——"

"But you are brother and sister. I am very glad you met. And, if they wish it, you will go?"

"With you—not otherwise. But no need to talk about that. Let us talk about the dinner—a regular grand Richerden dinner, and some of the best of Richerden folk at it—the little leaven which leavens the whole lump. I like the Griersons. And you?"

"Yes; they are your friends, and this

is your country; I wish to love it, and them. But I am afraid you will never make a grand lady of me, like—like your sister."

Heaven forbid! Roderick was on the point of saying, but he did not. In his tender heart there was a pitiful sense of apologizing for his own people. He knew all their faults; but they had belonged to him all his days. Kissing his wife, he said, with a smile, "Sisters are sisters, and wives wives; I am quite satisfied with mine."

Then they began comparing notes about their evening's experience, and making great fun together, like a couple of children.

"I am so glad," he said, "to be

married to somebody who can laugh."

"And I to somebody who will let me laugh. I am afraid I am in some things very unlike what old Mrs. Grierson told me you Scotch people approve of; I do not enjoy being miserable."

"My darling, God forbid that I or anyone should ever try to make you miserable!"

And the duty of the husband—as needful as the so-much-talked-of "obedience" of the wife—to love and to cherish, "even as his own flesh," the woman he has married, she who, out of mere womanhood, is certain to have in her lot much that is very hard—this solemn duty forced itself upon the young man. He resolved to bear anything, everything himself, rather

than allow a hair of his wife's head to suffer.

A boy in love, and a man who loves as perhaps only a man can love, and certainly can only love one woman,—he now saw what a world of difference there is between! And as day by day his old, solitary, selfish life drifted fast away, till he almost forgot he had ever been a "bachelor," he thanked heaven for making him, not only a happier, but, he believed, a better man, and infinitely more of a man in the truest and highest sense, for having a woman to take care of.

CHAPTER VIII.

Society.

"IT never rains but it pours," said Roderick two days after, throwing over to Silence a heap of letters which had succeeded a whole pack of cards, left luckily during a day's absence, when he had been showing her some Scotch mountains, and apologizing for their not being Alps. "Here are invitations enough. The way of the world! Once met at the Griersons', all Richerden is satisfied and

delighted to visit us. Even my sister; did you notice these?"

The cards of Mr. and Mrs. Alexander Thomson, and a formal dinner invitation, sufficiently proved Bella's sisterly feelings.

"We shall go?" Silence was still feeble in those auxiliary verbs which, to a native, can take such delicate shades of meaning. Her husband could hardly tell whether or not she wished to go. But he knew she ought to go, even if at some slight sacrifice to both; therefore he merely assented, without opening any discussion pro or con. She tacitly accepted his "Yes," and he went on explaining or criticizing the other invitations.

"After all, the world is exceedingly like a flock of sheep. Let one jump the ditch, the others are sure to follow. And this was a very wide ditch to jump, truly," added he, looking round the room. "We ought certainly to take a house, if only for the sake of our friends. What agony it must have cost some of them to stop their carriages in front of a flat!"

Silence laughed merrily. "And yet we are happy in it! It is ugly, I know that; but I think I have never been so happy in my life; and as for all this visiting, is it quite, quite necessary?"

Roderick was but a man, and a proud man. All the prouder perhaps from a slight consciousness of having sunk in the world—if people chose so to consider it

—sunk from wealth and idleness to a small income, and what some would call the disgrace, some the dignity, of labour.

He hesitated a little; then said, gently,

"Yes, my wife, if you do not dislike it very much, I think it is quite necessary."

"That is enough; we will go."

"Out of mere obedience, my darling?"

"No," she said, answering his smile with a sweet gravity, "I do not think it is in me blindly to obey anyone, not even you. But I honour you so much in all things I can understand that, in things I do not quite understand, I trust you. That is the only true and safe obedience."

So they went to dinner after dinner. At Richerden the only idea of "society" consisted in dining. One invitation followed another rapidly, for it was near the end of the season, and most families were beginning to think of the periodical "going to the coast." Yet Roderick liked it; Silence too, after a fashion. "It makes one feel," she said once when they had come back, "in the sma' hours," to their quiet home, "like sitting safe in a sheltered hut, with the rain pelting outside."

Roderick laughed. "This place rather resembles a hut, certainly; but would Richerden be flattered by your likening its splendid hospitalities to 'an even-down-pour'?"

Silence coloured. "I don't mean that.

You know what I mean. Visiting is pleasant. I am glad to feel you are not ashamed of me, and oh, I am so proud of you! But still that is only our outside life. The real life is this."

She crept close to him. She felt the beating of the strong true heart that she knew was wholly her own. Then lifting up her face, all wet with peaceful tears, she looked earnestly at her husband.

"I am so sorry, I never can tell how sorry, for the women who are *not* happy."

Whether Mrs. Alexander Thomson, with whom they had just been dining, was a happy woman or not, neither of these two discussed, nor did the lady herself

betray. Either by her own will, or her husband's, Bella showed the young couple every civil attention, though more as an acquaintance than a sister-in-law. Whenever she invited them there was always a party—those large parties which are such safeguards against dangerously confidential intercourse; and she set them down to banquet upon every delicacy of the season. But, but——

There is a proverb—Roderick sometimes thought of it nowadays, and felt that he could almost understand it—"Better is a dinner of herbs where love is, than a house full of sacrifices with strife."

Their "dinner of herbs" was growing nearer than they thought.

Roderick one day came in from a call on Mr. Maclagan, whose hospitalities they had also shared, and Silence, with her sweet nature and wide power of sympathy, had persisted that even Mrs. Maclagan was, when you came to know her, not so black as she was painted. Mr. Maclagan, Roderick allowed, was always liked and likeable—till now. She saw immediately that something had gone seriously wrong.

"What is it? Your mother?"

"No, dear; not my mother this time. She is well and happy in England. I may safely forget her, as she does me. It is only—oh, Silence! did you ever know what it was to owe a lot of money and not have a halfpenny to pay it with?

At least, I don't mean we are at our last halfpenny, but we—that is, I—have been spending a good deal more than I ought, and Maclagan has just told me so, and—but this is childish—you must not heed it, darling," said he, trying to hide his extreme perturbation.

For a minute or two she let him hide it, or think he did—going on with her needlework as if nothing was the matter, while he took up his writing-case, and went off to the other end of the room. This could not last. She crept behind his chair, and soon he felt her arms round his neck. He caught them there, and, imprisoning the two little hands, kissed them many times.

"I don't know how it is, I ought not

to trouble you, and yet I have got into such a habit of telling you everything——"

"Is that wrong?"

"Only on your account. You are so young, my darling. I ought to bear my own burdens, and yours too. Yet now I seem too weak for either. What in the world shall I do?"

He leaned his head on his hands in deep depression. Silence came and knelt beside him. She was very young, very childish, or child-like, in many things, and hitherto her husband had treated her like a child; an idol, certainly, but still a child. Now their positions seemed reversed. He looked up at her for a moment, then laid his head on her shoulder with a sigh of relief.

"Oh, it would be such a comfort to tell you everything."

"Do so, then."

The "everything" was not very serious, but it seemed so to him, who had never in all his life known what it was to want anything he wished for.

"I am an idiot, I know I am, to feel so keenly the lack of a few pounds; but I never was used to this sort of thing. Maclagan asked me to show him my 'accounts.' Why, I never kept accounts in all my days! My mother allowed me so much a year, or half-year. I spent it, and when it was done I came to her for more. Not that I was ever extravagant; she knew that—but, oh, Silence! money seems to slip through my fingers in the most

marvellous way. As Maclagan told me, and I could not deny it, I no more know how to make the best of a small income than if I were a baby. Do you?"

He looked up in such a piteously helpless fashion that she could have smiled, had she not felt so infinitely tender over him. But it was the tenderness which is born of utmost reverence. Without any arguing, she answered simply, "Suppose I try;" and began looking over the mass of papers before him, which he himself regarded with an expression almost of despair.

Poor fellow! he had got into what women call "a regular muddle;" like many another man who, neglecting or despising

the small economies which result in large comforts, and regardless of the proportions of things, and the proper balance of expenditure, drifts away into endless worries, anxieties, sometimes into absolute ruin, and all for want of the clear head, the firm, careful hand, and, above all, the infinite power of taking trouble, which is essentially feminine.

Roderick watched his wife slowly untying the Gordian knot, which he, manlike, would have liked to dash his sword through.

"What patience you have!" he said. "Do throw it all aside. You must be very tired."

"Oh, no; it is my business; I ought to have undertaken it before. My mo-

ther used to say it was the man's part to earn the money, the woman's to use it. I can, a little. Mamma let me keep house ever since I was seventeen. I managed all her affairs. Perhaps, if you would let me try——"

"To manage mine, and me?"

"No!" a little indignantly. "I am afraid I should despise the man I 'managed.' But I would like to take my fair half of the work of life. Yours is outside, mine inside. Will that do? Is it a bargain?"

"My love! yes."

"Now"—with a pretty imperiousness—"you must give me all the money you have, and all the bills you owe, and tell me exactly how much you have a year.

Then take a book and read. No"—passing her hand over his forehead, which was burning hot—"go and lie down for an hour. When you wake up you shall find all right."

Poor Roderick! he could not resist; he was quite worn out with the irritations of the day, and that morbid anxiety peculiar to temperaments like his own, but from which he had hitherto been shielded by kindly Fate. Now Fate had turned round, and left him unshielded, except by his naturally brave heart, and that other —only a woman's. But a woman's heart with love at its core, is not exactly the weakest thing in the world.

He slept an hour, and then saw his wife standing beside him with her grave little

face, and a "memorandum" in her hand, wherein their incomings and outgoings were set down with scrupulous neatness and as much accuracy as was attainable under the circumstances.

"How clever you are!" Roderick cried, enthusiastically, until he discovered the sad deficit, which must be met somehow. How? "Perhaps the people would wait; Richerden tradesmen often do."

"If they could, we could not," Silence answered, gravely. "They must be paid."

"How? Not by asking my mother; it is impossible," added he, abruptly. "And otherwise, what can I do? 'I cannot dig; to beg I am ashamed.'"

Roderick spoke with great bitterness.

His wife made no answer, but went into her bed-room and brought out a large jeweller's case—necklet, bracelet, brooch.

"It was very good of you, dear, to give me these. I know what they cost, for I have found the receipted bill; still, if we had, not the jewels, but the money——"

Roderick drew himself up with exceeding pride. "Am I come to such a pass that I require to sell my wife's ornaments? It is a little hard." Then bursting out hotly, as she had never before seen him do—"No, Silence, you are only a girl; you don't understand the world, or you would never have suggested such a thing. Not that; anything but that."

"There is nothing but that, so far as I see," she answered, gently but firmly.

"It is true I am a girl; but I am not quite ignorant of the world—at least of its troubles. Mamma and I were often very poor—so poor that we did not always have enough to eat; but we held our heads high, because we owed no one anything. She used to say, 'My child, what we cannot pay for, we will go without.' I always obeyed her. I must do so still. You must never ask me to wear these jewels."

He was so astonished that his sudden wrath melted away in a moment. The gentle creature whom he could have ruled with a word! Yet by her look, as she quietly put the ornaments back and laid the case aside, he knew she meant what she said, and that nothing would ever move her to act against her conscience.

"Do you not care for them, the gifts I gave you?" said Roderick, tenderly.

"Care for them? do I not? But I care for you still more. I would rather never wear jewels to the day of my death than see my husband look as he has looked this day."

"But to sell your ornaments! even if I can do it, which I doubt? My poor child! what would Richerden people say?"

"Would Richerden think it more discreditable that you should sell my ornaments than that your tradespeople should go without their money? Then I think the sooner we leave Richerden the better."

"Have we quarrelled, you and I?"

"I don't know," she said, half smiling.

Roderick paused a minute, and then held out his arms.

"You are right; I will do it."

"Not you, dear; these things are so much easier to women than to men. Let me go to the jeweller and say——"

"That you do not like them?"

"No; for that would not be true. I like them very much—as I like all pretty things. But I like other things better—honour, peace, and a quiet mind. We will set ourselves right now, and after that we will be careful—very careful. You must earn the money, and, like Macbeth, 'leave all the rest to me;' then this will never happen again, I being so 'clever,' as you say."

The laugh in her voice, but the tears in her eyes,—who could withstand either? Not Roderick, certainly. Besides, he had the sense to see, what not all men can see, that there are things which a woman can do better than a man, in which a woman is often wise and a man foolish. It is not a question of superiority or inferiority, but merely of difference.

"I perceive," he said, "I must give you the reins, and sink into my right place in the household chariot. Well, perhaps it is best; far better than turning into a domestic Phaeton and setting the world on fire. Seriously, my darling, this shall *not* happen again, if you will help me."

So ended their first quarrel, which Silence persisted was not a quarrel, but

only a slight variety in opinion. And she did help him from that time forward; in many things that might otherwise have been very painful to a proud man, very wearisome to a busy man. But she had a way of doing them all, even the most humiliating, which took the sting out of them entirely. And when the money was obtained, everybody paid, and the preparations completed for the next day's journey to Blackhall, young Mrs. Jardine sat on her boxes, which she had packed with her own hands, looking pale and tired certainly, but with the cheerfullest of countenances. Her husband, too, went about whistling, "O Nannie, wilt thou gang wi' me?" in which song, sung under his instruction as to accent, she had created

quite a *furore* at several dinner-parties.

"Evidently you do not 'sigh to leave the flaunting town,' and are anything but disgusted with the 'lowly cot and russet gown' to which I am dooming you," said he, laughing. "So give me the song; even though our piano is gone, and our parlour looks anything but that 'bower of roses by Bendemeer's stream,' to which you are so often calling my attention. Sing, my bird!"

She sat down and sang, clear as a bell and gay as a lark, the lovely old ditty. Her voice was her one perfectly beautiful possession, "except," as Roderick sometimes said, "except her soul," of which it was the exponent. He listened to it with all his heart in his eyes.

"Do you remember, Silence, that first night at the Reyniers', when you sang 'My Queen'? And again—no, you could not remember that—the first Sunday when I heard you singing behind me, unseen, in Neuchâtel Cathedral? It sounded like the voice of an angel—my good angel. And now I have her in my home, my own home, for ever! And she is—only a woman, and has got no wings."

"Nor has my angel neither! He is—only a man; and I find out a new—shall I call it peculiarity?—in him every day. And, worse, he cannot sing at all; he can only whistle; but——"

And then, being a weak-minded woman at best, and also exceedingly tired, she

stopped laughing and began crying, clinging passionately to her husband's breast.

"Oh! take care of me, and I will take care of you, as well as I can. We are very young, very foolish; but we may help one another. Only love me, and then—— No, whether you love me or not, I shall always love you."

"My darling!"

"But"—with the sun breaking brightly through the summer shower—"since you do love me, all will go well. We will fight the world together, and not be afraid. No"—tossing back her light curls (they were terribly unfashionable, and she had been urged to abolish them, but Roderick objected, and they remained)—"no"—and a gleam that might have come

from some Highland ancestress of both, fearless till death, and faithful till death, shone in Silence's eyes—"I am afraid of nothing, so long as I have you."

CHAPTER IX.

Fairest of the Fair.

THEY were standing together, the young husband and wife, at "their ain door," in the long northern twilight, the midsummer twilight, beautiful as I have never seen it anywhere but in Scotland: cold, gloomy, rainy Scotland.

But as if Nature herself wished to be kind to the souls that loved her, and unto whom the world was just a little unkind, from the day they reached Blackhall there

had set in an extraordinary long spell of fair weather. Scent of roses, songs of nest-building birds, sunshiny days, and nights such as this one, when the earth lay sleeping in a pale amber light, and the far-off mountains looked like the gates of heaven;—such had been their compensations for a good many painful, troublesome, difficult things in their brief married life, and especially their life at Richerden.

Now had come to them the hallowed time, which even in happy marriage comes to few, and never comes for very long, so fast life's cares are sure to follow. The so-called honeymoon is rarely a time of complete happiness, everything being so new and strange. But they had now had

three months in which to grow used to one another, to smooth down passing differences, to find out and get over little mutual faults, to see and avoid the thorns among the roses, and to make acquaintance with what have been wittily dubbed the "two bears" of matrimony—"bear" and "forbear."

Already both were a good deal changed; the mysterious change which marriage makes to all, but to none so much as to those who marry early. Already they had learnt to forget themselves each in the other, with the hope of a long future in which to rub down opposing angles, striving to become "heirs together of the kingdom of heaven,"—that kingdom of heaven which begins on earth.

It seemed to have begun for them. Roderick's arm was round his wife's shoulders, instead of a shawl; for he had felt her shiver in the white dress which had now replaced her black one. Her head leant against his breast, her little hand had sought his, and lay safe in the soft firm clasp which was to her such a heaven of rest.

"How quiet everything is!" she said; "how plainly we can hear the burn singing down below—hear and not see—so that you cannot complain of the mill which has spoiled it so, nor grumble at the sins of your—our—misguided great-great-grandfather!"

This was an impecunious Jardine of the last century, who had sold two acres of

land, half a mile below the house, on which was built a cotton-mill, now owned by Mr. Black, the factor, their only near neighbour, and the only person who had yet called upon young Mrs. Jardine. He was an old bachelor—there was no Mrs. Black to call—which fact, remembering Mrs. Maclagan, was a great consolation to Roderick, who betrayed sometimes a lurking dislike both of the mill and its master.

"Yes, Blackhall is very quiet," he answered, "especially after Richerden. You don't regret Richerden, though you are 'no longer dressed in——' How does the line run?"

Silence sang out into the clear still night—no fear of listeners!—the verse—

"No longer dressed in silken sheen,
No longer decked wi' jewels rare,
Dost thou regret the courtly scene
Where thou wert fairest of the fair."

"Those 'jewels rare' about which I got so angry with you, my darling; and yet which purchased for us so much peace of mind, to say nothing of Mr. Maclagan's declaration 'that he had not met for years a lady he so much respected as young Mrs. Jardine!' Good, honest man! He never said so, but I think my poor opals will appear on Mrs. Maclagan's fat neck next winter."

"Never mind; they will make her happy; and I—my happiness does not lie in ornaments."

"What does it lie in, then?"

"Love."

He knew the whispered answer, without need of her giving it. Still, as he pressed his wife closer to him, he liked to hear it.

"Love is not everything perhaps. I mean—as our good friend Maclagan suggested when we bade him good-bye—

'Will the flame that you're so rich in light a fire in the kitchen,
Or the little God of Love turn the spit, spit, spit?'

We must be prudent. And we shall be, now the wife is Chancellor of the Exchequer. Still we may have a good deal to fight against, which even love will not shield us from. But, after all, 'Love is best!'"

"Is it? Do you really think so? For me it is; but you——" she stopped.

Silence was, as her husband often told her, "a very woman." Until her marriage she had been, as she sometimes owned, smiling, utterly ignorant of men and their crotchets; their ambitions, lawful and unlawful, their faults and virtues, both larger, maybe, than ours. Such knowledge, in short, which, whether for good or ill, no unmarried woman can possibly acquire. But this young wife was learning it day by day.

Slowly she began to feel—and in her large heart, wholly absorbed in her husband, to feel without pain—that to a man love is not all, nor ought to be. His life, meant to stretch far outside the home, should be sheltered, but not shut up within it; else it will assuredly wither at

the root, like a tree which has neither air to breathe nor room to grow in. And sometimes, though he never said it, never hinted that his marriage had cost him anything, there came a certain dulness over Roderick's face—the wistful dreariness of a man who has nothing to do, no special aim or ambition in life, which told its own tale.

—Told just so much, no more. And Silence, being a practical rather than a sentimental woman, had made for herself no unnecessary misery out of it. She knew her husband too well to imagine he counted as sacrifices the small, selfish, personal luxuries in which young men indulge, and which he had to give up in marrying. Doubtless he had liked them

well enough, but they were not necessary to him, for the very refinement of his nature gave it a simplicity almost ascetic. Frugal as their table was, he ate what was set before him without complaining; and day after day he took long walks across country, without ever hinting that never in his life before had he been without his great enjoyment—a good horse to ride.

No, these were not the things he missed, and his wife knew it. But he missed work, and—just a very little—society. Also, there was one pang, not always there (for deceive ourselves as we may, we parents, our children can be happy without us!), still a sore pang whenever it did come—the total silence of his own people

towards him. Since—except that one state dinner, and the call afterwards, when Mrs. Alexander Thomson was "not at home"—even Bella had been too indifferent, or too cowardly, to make any further sisterly sign. The acquaintance had tacitly dropped.

"We are just ourselves—our own two selves," said Roderick, answering his wife's words, and perhaps the unspoken thoughts of both. "We shall have to fight the world together, and alone; but we will do it, never fear. You shall help me, and I will help you—if I can. By the way—if one dare name such a thing in face of those glorious hills—did your new kitchen-range work well to-day?"

She laughed merrily.

"Yes, everything is beginning to work well; after a good deal of trouble."

"I know that, my darling. Anybody less happy-minded than you would have made a mountain of misery out of the chaos I have brought you into. Poor Cousin Silence! Blackhall could not have been thus in her lifetime; she was very dainty and orderly, I believe; but she has been dead nearly two years now."

"Dear Cousin Silence!"—with a sudden pathos in her voice which struck her husband. "I think a good deal of Cousin Silence. It seems so strange that we should be here—and so happy—we two. Did you know, Roderick, that this was her favourite walk—this terrace—hers and Cousin Henry's?"

"Cousin Henry—that must have been my father?"

"Yes, my father always called him so. He used to speak of him sometimes, not very often. I have never told you"—here her voice fell into the tenderest whisper—"but I have sometimes thought, if they all knew it, they would be very glad that we two were married. Because, as I found out by some letters I had to look over after mamma died, Cousin Silence ought to have married Cousin Henry, if my father had not come between them in some cruel way. He was very sorry afterwards—poor papa! but it was too late, I suppose. And they are all dead now, and we are here. Is it not strange?"

"Very strange. Poor Cousin Silence!"—Then, with a sudden and inexplicable revulsion of feeling, Roderick added—"We will not talk of this any more. You see, I am my mother's son. She loved him dearly, and he was the kindest of husbands to her—my poor father!"

"And so was papa to mamma. But oh, Roderick!"—and, clinging to him with a sudden passionate impulse, she burst into tears—"love is best—love is best! O my God, I thank Thee! Take what thou wilt from me, but leave me this; let me never live to hear my husband say that love was *not* best!"

Roderick soothed and quieted her. She had been very tired that day, working, as he declared, "like a nigger slave," over

her domestic affairs. Then they sat down together, still under the starlight—it was impossible to go indoors that lovely night—and began talking of the future, planning out their life, the long sweet life they were to pass together. Full of work—of hard work, maybe—but work, each for each, and, after that, for the outside world; in which, the young man owned, he should like dearly to play a man's part, somehow, in some way, so as to leave the world a little better than he found it. Nothing strange in this, nothing new, and yet it seemed all deliciously new to these two young people, and especially to the wife, who thought her husband capable of everything great or noble.

"That may be all very true," said Rode-

rick, laughing. "Let us suppose that I could be a king or an emperor, if I tried, and if anybody asked me. But no fear of that. No doubt it is foolish to complain of having nothing to do, when there is endless work to be done in the world—only, how am I to find it?"

"That is what puzzles me too," answered Silence. And her husband laughed at the grave judge-of-session expression of her face, as he saw it in the wonderfully clear glimmer of the zodiacal light. "You have been brought up to no profession, no business, though you are growing more business-like every day. It is useless trying for any appointment, for we have got no friends—no grand friends, that is, with influence to help us. Besides, that would

entail our quitting Blackhall—and you want to live at Blackhall—and we have decided that we can do it if——"

"If you will take care of all the money, and spend it carefully; sending me about the world with a pound-note in my pocket, which I have the strictest injunctions never to change——"

"Roderick!" They were such innocent, merry children still.

Very soon "young Mrs. Jardine," as he was fond of calling her, put on her wise face again, and both it and her words often had a curious wisdom—not worldly wisdom, but that wisdom which has been characterized as coming "from God"—"first pure, and then peaceable."

"There is a saying, Roderick—you read

it out of the Bible this very morning at prayers—'Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might.' That means, as it seems to me, at least, do not go beating about the bush, and vexing yourself with trying after a hundred things that you cannot do, but do something which you can do. I have been thinking of you a great deal, my husband, and one thing has occurred to me. You are very clever; you know you gave me a whole heap of MSS.—prose and poetry—which you wrote at college."

"When I was so foolish as to think I should be an author some day."

"Well, why not? All other professions cost oceans of money and years of labour. Authorship costs nothing but pen, ink, and paper."

"And a few brains, which you think I have, my wife, but—query?"

She looked up with tender admiration at the handsome face, thoroughly manly, and yet with a strange feminine sweetness such as is often supposed to imply that mysterious quality called genius. He might have had it in degree, or else, more likely, his nature belonged to the borderland of the appreciative rather than the creative—still his wife believed in him, wholly, utterly.

"I would give my life to see my husband a great man, and to help him to become one!" said she, with a suppressed passion which quite startled Roderick. Then, laughing again, as if half ashamed of her own earnestness, "Suppose, since

we cannot afford to buy books, you were to set to work to write one ?"

"You little Solon !" cried Roderick, and said no more.

But there was a gleam in his eye, a hope in his heart. Something in his wife's words had stirred in him that ambition which every man has, or ought to have, else he is no true man at all—the wish to do something, to be something; to cease drifting aimlessly down the stream of life, in the passing pleasures of the day, but to take firm root somewhere; strike root downwards, and bear fruit upwards. And the woman that hinders him from doing this is no true wife, but a mere parasite that smothers and impedes the growth of the tree. Ay, even though she may gar-

land him as gorgeously as the lianas do the trees in western forests, with what she calls love, but which is in truth the merest selfishness.

Such was not—never could have been—the love of Silence Jardine.

From that night, when, having called her "a little Solon," he said no more, but sat beside her, looking across at the dim mountains and amber sky, and thinking his own thoughts—uncommunicated, perhaps uncommunicable—Roderick began in good earnest the work she had suggested. It involved his shutting himself up many hours daily, and being so absorbed when he did appear—after the fashion of young writers before they learn that true authorship is a duty, not a passion—a daily

labour, and not an accidental "mood"—that sometimes he had hardly a word to say to her, and she scarcely knew whether to smile at, or stand in awe of, his silence and abstraction.

He had his weak points, no doubt, this lovable and well-loved Roderick; perhaps his wife saw them, perhaps she did not. And she had hers, which doubtless he had also found out by this time. But as she sometimes said, in the gravely simple way she had of putting things—the great secret of domestic life is to be able to recognize, first, our own incapacities, and next, the incapacities of those dear to us, so as to conquer the one, and be happy with, even in spite of, the other.

And they were happy, no doubt of that,

for their happiness lay in the safe strength of satisfied affection, which, like the key-note of a tune, settled the music of their life, guiding its perplexed measure into one harmonious end.

CHAPTER X.

The Wolf at the Door.

AS months went on, the great problem of making ends meet to the young husband and wife gradually became more difficult. Silence, brought up in that best school, poverty—when not actually grinding poverty—had started their small *ménage* on the safe principle of paying for everything at once, and buying nothing that she could not pay for. But the differences between Swiss house-keeping and

Scotch were considerable; she often found herself at fault. She had to learn her lesson all afresh, and sometimes it was rather a hard one. At first she brought all her difficulties and distresses to her husband; he listened with his usual sweet patience, but she soon found that he did not understand, or was grieved and troubled; so, by degrees, she took all these domestic burdens on herself alone. "It is easy for me to bear them," she argued; "but he——"

And then he was writing a book! She who, without being literary, had lived in an atmosphere of literature, at least of book-loving people, looked on him with a tender awe, and kept from him everything that could annoy him or hinder his im-

portant work; going quietly about her own, which she thought so inferior, yet which in her secret heart—despise her not, ye learned ladies!—she was woman enough not merely to do, but to enjoy doing.

To some wives, and not the worst of them, half the pleasure of marriage is to be mistress of a house! The faculty of arrangement—of touching with that wonderful rod of the fairy Order all the confused elements of domestic life, and converting them into smoothness and peace; the power of government, as essential in a family as in a state, of setting all the wheels working, and taking care that they are well oiled, so that the machinery is kept going; pleasing the eye and soothing the

heart with a sense of comfort and of the fitness of things; all these qualities Silence possessed in a very large measure. And to use what one possesses, to have occasion for doing what one feels one can do well, is a pleasant thing to all women.

She was a born mistress of a household, this young Mrs. Jardine; none the less so because of a something in her beyond it all, which made her often stop a moment in her daily labours to look at "the blue hills far away," to listen to the singing of the burn in the glen, or the birds in the garden, and perhaps carol a ditty herself there, when she was gathering flowers or pulling fruit, out in the open air, for they had no piano, and she would not hear of

buying one till the book was done and they had plenty of money.

Plenty of money—out of a first book, by a "prentice han'!"—they must have been most innocent and ignorant souls to believe this! Yet they did. That MS. was a novel, of course—but, owing to the author's small experience of life and the difficulty he found in painting nature, thrown back out of nature into the far past, into that classic time which the young collegian, who was a good Greek scholar, fancied would be as interesting to others as it was to himself. He discussed it incessantly, in that sweet companionship which was a reflection of himself, till he almost felt like a modern Pericles, inspired by a nobler, holier, and purer Aspasia.

And she—she smiled and listened; not always thinking everything perfect because Roderick did it, but still much inclined that way, and in any doubtful case giving him the benefit of the doubt. Between whiles she did her own work, as he his, so conscientiously that very often they scarcely saw one another all day long. But then came the blessed evenings together, which healed all the day's worries and cares. They walked out when the weather was possible, and then when the inevitable rain came on they nestled down by the welcome fire—made more delicious, perhaps, by the beating of the storm outside.

"Yes, I think I rather like the rain," said Silence once as they were sitting

"four feet on a fender," the lamp between them, and she was putting a stitch or two into his coat—alas! his clothes began to need mending a little, he that had been "the glass of fashion and the mould of form;" but he scarcely noticed it, being absorbed in other things. "You know, dear, we were winter lovers, and half our courtship was done in snow and rain. I shall always love the rain."

"My darling, you are in one thing unlike all women—at least, all that I ever knew. You invariably prefer what you have instead of what you have not. Suppose, now, just for a change, you were to begin worrying my life out because I cannot give you half a dozen servants and a carriage and pair, or take you out

into society? My wife, do you mind being poor?"

"Do you? When you are a Jardine—we are both Jardines for that matter—and you are to be a great author, or a great man, some day?"

"Evidently my wife does not believe the two synonymous," said Roderick, laughing and colouring.

"Not quite, because the author may fail; whereas the man who does his work—any work—as conscientiously as you are doing it, must always be, in one sense, a great man. Also the one is the world's property, the other is mine!"

She put her arms round his neck; he leant against her, for he was, in truth, a

good deal tired. His book had been "bothering" him, and he was not used to being bothered, not accustomed to the endless labour, the perpetual struggle between impulse and perseverance, moods of errant fancy and deliberate, mechanical, matter-of-fact toil, which all professional authors understand but too well.

He might or might not have been a genius; he certainly did not think himself one, poor Roderick! being always painfully alive to his own shortcomings; but all the more, it comforted him that his wife did think so, and had the faith in him which he had not always in himself. Human nature may be weak, but there is often a pathos in its weakness; and few

laments have been more touching than that of the Prophet Mohammed, whom even the young, fair, second wife could not console for the loss of his old Cadiga. "Ah, but it was Cadiga who *believed in me.*"

That Silence Jardine believed in her Roderick might have been a mistake, even a folly; but she did believe, and it made her happy. Through all their weariness, solitude, and poverty—not actual need, but still hearing sometimes the distant bark of the "wolf" that might soon come to their door—the young husband and wife were, nevertheless, thoroughly happy. All people might not have been so—not even married people, who took their standpoint in external

things, thought a great deal of "What will the world say?" or delighted in material pleasures not obtainable at Blackhall. But it had been a just criticism passed by old Mrs. Grierson on Roderick's young wife, that she was "in the world, and not of it;" therefore she was happy, and she made him happy too.

"It's done at last!" said he, almost with a shout, as, one late autumn morning, with the scent of clematis and jasmine coming in at the open window, he finished his book, writing, in his best and neatest hand, "The End" on the final page. "And yet I am half sorry! I have killed them all, or married them—made them quite comfortable, anyhow—

and now I rather miss them. They had grown such companions; had they not, dear?"

Silence smiled; but yet, as she tenderly tied up the MS., carefully counting the pages, to be sure that none were missing, a tear fell on the last one. It was so dear to her, this first work of her husband's, done in their first year of married life, and full of so many associations. She was sure, even if it came to the twentieth edition, she should never cease to remember and cherish it, every line.

"Twentieth editions do not come every day, even to celebrated authors," said Roderick, sapiently. "I should be glad to sell even the first five, and get the money."

"Money—I am afraid I had forgotten the money," said Silence—as, indeed, she had.

But for a good many days after, when, the excitement of work over, a re-action came, and Roderick looked more pale and ill than she had ever seen him, she began to count over her little store, as if by counting she could double it, and to long, day by day, for the letter which was to bring the hope of that despised necessity —pounds, shillings, and pence.

Celebrated authors are usually treated with courtesy and kindliness by eminent publishers, well aware that—

> "the value of a thing
> Is just as much as it will bring,"

but unknown and amateur authors who

rashly send their MSS. to busy firms, unto whom their small venture is a mere drop in the bucket, an unconsidered nothing, received and laid indefinitely aside, do not always meet the same consideration.

Day after day Roderick and Silence stood together at their gate—somehow, without planning, it always did happen that they met together there, at the precise hour when the postman might be seen slowly winding up the long road; but in vain. He seldom left them any letters: never the letter which would have been such a priceless boon.

Roderick wrote a second time;—a third time Silence hinted at; but he shook his head.

"I am a proud man; I would as lief be the unjust judge as the woman who, by her continual coming, wearied him into justice. What a strange, sad world it is, my darling!"

And then by degrees he fell into that deep depression so much commoner to men than to women, in which women often have to stand by, quite powerless, thankful only if there still remains, untouched, that sweet nature, that pathetic appeal for sympathy, which was in Roderick's eyes when he said "my darling."

But this could not last; he would have been more that human else—or less. A young man in his prime, with strong ambitions, high aspirations—all, in fact,

that makes the difference between the man who wishes really to live, for this world and the next, and the man who is content to feel, or act as if he felt, "Let us eat and drink, for to-morrow we die,"—for such a man to be shut up in a narrow Eden, even with his beloved Eve by his side—it could not be!

And, in one sense, it ought not to be. When at last he grew irritable, and Silence had to recognize the fact that women have a good deal to bear, not only for, but from, those whom they deeply love—still she did not blame him; how could she? "It is so much harder for him than for me," she argued; and perhaps it was.

"I try to be good—I do try!" he

would sometimes say with an almost child-like pathos, after he had been "cross" with her. "Believe me, I am more vexed with myself than ever you can be with me. Now you—nothing ever seems to vex you."

"That's all you know," she answered, gaily. "I may turn out to be 'a goodly villain with a smiling cheek,' as your Shakspeare has it."

"Smiling, but just a little too pale, my 'villain,'" said Roderick, stroking it tenderly. And they kissed and forgave one another.

It is not true, as some special pleaders for sinners try to make out, that the more one forgives the better one loves; but it is true that the strongest rivet in the

fabric of domestic love is mutual forgiveness, when followed by mutual amendment. These sore weeks of suspense, which tried them both so much, haply taught these young people a few lessons, which they would never forget for the remainder of their lives.

The last and hardest came one day when they had been rather brighter than usual. Silence had persuaded her husband to walk down with her to the obnoxious cotton-mill, in which she had become much interested—having instituted, or rather carried on anew, a school for the mill girls, which had been the favourite work of Miss Jardine. "You will let me do it, just because she did it?" was the entreaty which Roderick could not resist. So every

Sunday, while he took the long stretch across country which she insisted upon after the labours of the week, she had gone down to an empty room at the mill and kept school there for two hours.

To-day the girls recognized her with delight, and her husband, pleased with her pleasure, glad too of any relief in his monotonous life, had talked to the "hands," examined the machinery, and acknowledged that there might be a worse lot in life than to be master of a mill.

"At one time I wanted to be an engineer, but my mother thought the profession not 'genteel' enough. She would have put me into 'the house,' but, though I loved machinery, I hated trade.

You would not have wondered, had you ever known my grandfather Paterson——" Roderick stopped. "But he is dead—and he was a clever man, and an honest, in his own way."

It was one of the things which Silence most loved in her husband, part of the infinite respect deepening every day, which would have made her pass over ever so many little faults in him, that she never heard him speak ill-naturedly or unkindly of any human being.

"I almost wish I had been in our firm, or some other, that you might—

> 'walk in silk attire,
> And siller ha'e to spare.'

But after all, my wife, you would not have cared to see me a millionaire, and a

money-grubber;—Grub Street seems a deal nearer my mark."

They both laughed and entered the house gaily—almost for the first time with out looking on the hall-table for the vague expectation of something. It was not till Silence had taken off her hat and begun to make the tea that she saw a large carrier's parcel with the "eminent publisher's" label outside—one of those neatly done up, innocent-looking parcels which often carry with them a stroke of absolute doom.

"Let me open it," said Silence—and her husband let her.

It was a civil note, a very civil note, placed on the top of the MS., and expressing great regret that the latter was

found "unsuitable." In reading it Roderick's hands shook nervously, and his colour went and came.

"Never mind, it does not matter; it was what I should have expected," was all he said.

"No, it does not matter," said Silence, firmly. "They only say it is 'unsuitable' to them. It may suit some one else. Let us try."

"Yes, let us try," echoed Roderick, mechanically, his hand before his eyes. "And if we fail——"

"'We fail;
But screw our courage to the sticking place,
And we'll not fail.'"

"My Lady Macbeth!" said he, scarcely able to forbear a smile at the sweet broken

English, and the brave heart which tried so hard to keep up his own. "Then let us once more go together to 'murder sleep'—or only a publisher. Whom shall the MS. be sent to next?"

What endless power of re-action, what unconquerable hope there is in youth! We elders often look back on our own, wondering at the daring ignorance that could breast such unknown monster waves, or fancy we could ride in our little cock-boats over seas where many a good ship has gone hopelessly down. Yet so it was, and so it always will be.

That very day—for Silence never let any grass grow under her feet—she re-packed the MS. and sent it to another house; from whence it came back at

once; unopened, as all arrangements were made up—in fact, the head of the firm was just starting for Switzerland. He, honest man—for publishers are but men, though poor authors will not always believe it—being perhaps a little worn out with a year of worries—the *genus irritabile* are the most worrying folk alive!—added a well-meant but quite unnecessary sting to the effect that "he would advise the author to try another tack—historical novels never sold."

"Then I had better burn it," said Roderick, quietly. But as he advanced to the fire there was an expression in his face which his wife had never seen before. She flung herself before him in an agony of tears.

"You shall not. It is mine, mine, whether the world likes it or not. We will never give in; we will try and try again. Don't you remember Bruce and the spider?"

"A good simile; because in the meantime I might lie in this horrid cave and starve. Thank you, my dear. No, I had rather go out, take my sword in my hand, and die fighting, die fighting!"

He laughed loudly; and then, utterly breaking down, he too burst into tears.

"I am ashamed of myself," he said at last. "But you do not know, no woman could know, how terrible this sort of life is to a man. To sit with my hands bound, and watch the tide come in, wave after wave—the tide that will drown us both.

Oh, if I could go anywhere—do anything! But I can do nothing—I was brought up to nothing. If I had ten sons"—he spoke wildly, nor noticed the sudden flush of the downcast face—"ay, and a fortune for each of them, I would still bring them up to earn their honest bread. Mother, mother, you have been very cruel to me!"

It was months since he had named his mother or any of his family. By common consent he and she had kept silence, even between one another, on this point, and they did so still.

Without any words, Silence laid her husband's head on her shoulder, soothing him less like a wife than a mother—or rather a combination of both. The wor-

shipped ideal, the "queen" of boyish fancy, had long ago melted into the mere woman —not perfect, but yet trying hard to be "as good as she could," both for love's sake and for the sake of that Love Divine which is at the root of it all. And so she was gradually becoming what a man so sorely needs his wife to be—comfort, solace, strength; his fellow-labourer as well as his counsellor; neither superior nor inferior to himself, only different.

CHAPTER XI.

The Wolf at Bay.

NOT that day, but the next, Silence made the wisest suggestion that could have been made—that they should accept the latest of the many invitations of good old Mrs. Grierson, and visit her—not at Richerden, but at the coast.

"You know she said all the Richerden people will have left by now," added Silence, hesitating.

"That means, we need not fear meeting

any of our relations or friends—we tabooed folk," answered Roderick, bitterly. Nevertheless, in his present condition, the very thought of change had a certain relief in it. "She is a dear soul—old Mrs. Grierson. I told you you would like her, and you did."

"Very much."

"Suppose then we were to strain a point and go!"

Silence did not tell him that straining a point was, as regarded money matters, more difficult than he knew; but she did somehow manage it, and they went. Not, however, until, after many consultations, the luckless MS. had again gone forth on its quest for a publisher; this time almost without hope, but simply

in the carrying out of that "dogged determination" which Roderick declared he now for the first time recognized in his wife.

"If I had had it!" he said, wistfully, as they sat together on the deck of one of those river steam-boats where all the *désagréments* of over-crowding and holiday-making cannot neutralize the pleasure of sea and sky, mountain and loch. "If I had had it, how much more I might have done!"

"You never know you have not got it till you try."

"My dear heart!" In the sanctity of very private life Roderick sometimes called his wife "my heart," or "my soul" —which was a great deal nearer the truth than many an idle pet name.

"Oh, this is delicious!" said he, as he drank in the salt air and amused himself with Silence's delight in a beauty which she declared made Scotland "better than Switzerland," the broad estuary running up into long hill-encircled lochs, where porpoises tumbled and white gulls wheeled screaming overhead, and the lights and shadows came and went, producing "effects" such as are seen nowhere but in this rainy, sunshiny land; a country which beyond all others seems to be a country with a soul, especially on its coast.

She, who, though brought up among mountains, had never seen the sea except when she crossed it at Calais, watched all these wonders with perfectly childish delight.

"How happy you are!" said Roderick, looking at her.

"Why not? when we two are together —always together."

Roderick smiled, not in gratified vanity, he had very little of that; but recognizing —as in selfish passion men never can recognize—the sweetness of being able to make another human being perfectly happy.

Mrs. Grierson's welcome was a treat to get. She was one of those old people whom all young people love—sympathetic, unexacting, expending wherever she could, and especially upon anyone that needed it, the warmth of her childless, motherless heart. Narrow she might be in her opinions—at least, some of the new genera-

tion, even Roderick himself, had thought so; but in her acts she was wide as charity itself.

And her house was one of those—not too many in this world—where guests feel entirely "at home." Not from its luxuries, though these were enough to make Roderick sometimes say mournfully, "I wish, my darling, I could give you such-and-such things at Blackhall!" but from the spirit of kindliness and peace that pervaded it all. One always found everything done that one wanted, and nothing that one did not want. Nobody ever attempted to "amuse" you, and yet you were never neglected, never allowed to feel that under the polite smile was the secret wish, "I wonder when they are going away!"

The young folks were left almost entirely to themselves, sitting out on the lovely shore, or climbing the heights—the same where Roderick had a year ago sat and dreamed of the then unseen and incredible She—as he told her once when she sat beside him. They wandered about, perfectly content, till dusk, when they came in, and submitted placidly to the sweet severities of late dinner. Mrs. Grierson belonged to one of the "old" Richerden families, and cherished the refined formality vainly imitated by the *nouveaux riches* of that society.

"But you seem quite at home," said Roderick to his wife. "You might have been a Richerden lady all your days, so well you play your part."

"I don't play it at all, dear. I really

enjoy myself—I enjoy everything—with you. How terrible it must be"—with a sudden shiver—"I hardly know which would be most terrible, having to part from one's husband, or parting, conscious that one was not sorry to part. Now, you and I are not always 'good,' my Roderick. Sometimes we vex one another—I don't believe a bit in your Dunmow flitch of bacon! Why, we have not been married six months, and I am sure we have quarrelled at least twelve times."

"Not quarrelled, only differed," answered he, laughing. "And, I suppose, all people do differ, and yet love one another to the end. You love me still?"

"Yes,"—with a sudden gravity—"because I respect you. I think there is one

only thing which could kill my love—if I ceased to respect you. I should do my duty still, but all love would go dead out, like a fire when one tramples on it. And then, I think, no power on earth could ever light it up again."

"God forbid!" Roderick said, startled by a kind of sad sternness which came into the gentle face. But it did him good, after all, to feel that there was that in his wife which would never suffer any man to make her into either a plaything or a slave. The next minute she had slipped her hand into his.

"Don't let us talk such nonsense, my Roderick; you will always love me, and hold me fast. I can bear anything so long as you hold me fast."

He did hold her fast, and through more trials than she guessed. To his sensitive nature, the continual dread of meeting Richerden people—old acquaintances who might speak to him or her of painful things—became a perfect bugbear. And though Mrs. Grierson, with her usual delicate tact, had managed to let him understand that his own family had all returned to town—that is, Richerden—for the winter, still he caught himself looking into every carriage that passed along the one beautiful sea-side road, every steamer that stopped at the now half deserted quay, with a nervous anxiety lest he should see some familiar face; familiar still, but welcome no more.

Suppose he did meet them—he only

said "them" without individualising—what should he do? Would nature and instinct triumph over reason, so that he could not ignore them, his own flesh and blood, look and pass by, as if they were common strangers? And once Silence, who, after a time, began to divine his unspoken thoughts, brought him face to face with them by a sudden question, put with a tender anxiety, but very earnestly.

"Roderick, I have often wanted to ask—what should you do if you were to meet your mother?"

"If *we* were to meet her, you mean; for we are never apart."

In truth he took care that he and his wife never should be apart, lest somebody or something should chance to wound her,

the defenceless creature whom every day he felt more bound to cherish, and concerning whom his indignation continually higher rose. A "tragedy in a tea-pot" may be, but none the less a tragedy; a shadow that was always coming between them and the sun; and worse here, after a little, when the first pleasantness of the change had worn off—worse certainly than at Blackhall.

By-and-by, he spoke of going back to Blackhall, but good Mrs. Grierson entreated they would stay on a little longer.

"It would do your wife good, and me too," she said. "Remember I have no daughter, and she no mother."

"That is true, poor child!" And he

looked across to where, in sweet unconscious peace, Silence sat, making with her deft fingers a cap for the old lady.

"Why call her 'poor'? Pardon me, my dear Roderick, but may I ask one question—has your mother ever seen your wife?"

"No."

"She ought to see her. Do you not think so?"

"What do you mean, Mrs. Grierson? But, excuse me, this is a subject upon which we had better not speak."

"I agree with you, and should never have spoken," said the old lady, nervously, "were it not almost my duty to tell you that Mrs. Jardine is at Fairfield, close by,

come unexpectedly on a three-days' visit. She may not come to see me, and she may. If she does——"

"We will leave immediately," said Roderick, rising. "Indeed, my dear Mrs. Grierson, it is much better so. We should grieve to cause you a moment's inconvenience."

"My dear," laying her hand on his arm, and looking at him with sweet calm eyes that were so near the other world as to have half forgotten the sorrows of this. "My dear, I knew you as soon as you were born. Forgive an old woman who never had a child; but mothers are mothers—don't you think that, instead of going away, you should rather stay, on the chance of seeing your mother?"

"See my mother? what, she— But, indeed, I cannot talk over these things, which, I suppose, you know all about. Everybody does know everybody else's affairs in Richerden."

"Yes, I know."

"Then it is kind of you not to have spoken to me before. Let us continue that wholesome silence. Let me take my wife and go."

"Suppose your wife and I were to settle that question. She is the dearest little woman in all the world. I only wish I had had her for my daughter. Women understand women best," she added, with a gentle smile. "I think, my dear boy, you had better walk away."

Roderick did not walk away; but he

suffered Mrs. Grierson to go over and speak to his wife. Finally, the ice once broken, they were able to talk over these painful things all three together. The younger ones poured out their grief and wrath; at least, Roderick did; Silence said nothing. The elder woman listened patiently and tenderly, yet took a little the opposite side, for there are two sides to every subject, and those are the wisest people who in youth can see with old—in age with young eyes.

Deep as her sympathy was, seventy views things a little differently from twenty-seven. The warm motherly heart could not choose but put itself in the mother's place—the mother who had so wholly lost, or persuaded herself that

she had lost, her beloved and only son.

"I have known Mrs. Jardine ever since her marriage," Mrs. Grierson explained to Silence. "She is a woman of strong prejudices, strong passions, but generous and kindly; doing wrong things sometimes, as we all do, but doing them with the best intentions, which not all of us do. But I beg your husband's pardon for criticizing his mother, who is so totally opposite to his wife that, on the principle that extremes meet, I should not wonder if, when you do meet, you were to like one another amazingly."

Roderick made no answer; but, whether he believed it or not, the idea certainly seemed to comfort him. He listened with a patience that surprised himself to a

further homily and many gentle arguments; ending with one which youth is so slow to understand, that life is too short for anything but love and peace.

Yielding, at last, to her earnest entreaty, and to the mute appeal of his wife's eyes, Roderick consented that Mrs. Grierson should write a brief note to his mother, mentioning formally what guests she had in her house, and how happy she should be to see Mrs. Jardine, "were it convenient and agreeable."

The next six hours, spent within doors —they shrank from the chances of the road without—were not very happy hours to any of the trio.

It was nearly night—a red stormy sunset fading over the sea, the "white

horses" rising, a gale beginning to blow and dash the waves wildly against the rocks under the drawing-room windows. Roderick and Silence had been watching the twilight shadows upon the mountains, beyond which lay Blackhall and home.

"I almost wish we were at home," she whispered; and he had put his arms tenderly round her, when suddenly Mrs. Grierson entered with a letter in her hand.

"Read that, my dears. It is, I own, rather—surprising."

It was—from a mother. "Mrs. Jardine's compliments to Mrs. Grierson, and she does not intend going out to-day; but if Mr. Roderick Jardine has anything to

say to her he may come, provided he comes alone, at ten o'clock to-morrow."

These brief lines were passed round, and then the three regarded one another; doubtful who should speak first, and still more doubtful what to say.

At last Roderick, pressing his hostess's hand, bade her not to be troubled. She had done her best. "But you see, dear Mrs. Grierson, that I was right. We had better go home."

"And not go and see your mother?"

"Certainly not; without my wife. "Dear," turning to her affectionately, "we did not have it in our Swiss marriage service, though, I believe, it is in the English one; but there is a text—'What God hath joined together let no man put asunder.'

I do not mean to be put asunder from my wife—not even by my own mother."

He spoke smilingly, caressing her the while, but Silence burst into tears.

"And it is I that have been the cause of this—I, who—— Does she know, Roderick, that my mother is dead? And would anyone whose mother is dead wish to keep a son away from his living mother? Go to her, with or without me —only go?"

And, argue as he might, she refused to see the matter in any other light. A mother was a mother always. Mrs. Jardine had wished to see him, and he must go.

Roderick thought differently. To him it appeared the most arrant cowardice;

desertion of the wife he had deliberately chosen; acknowledgment of an error he had never committed. Besides, it was a weak truckling to the stronger side—the wealthy side.

"For (you may not know it, Mrs. Grierson, though it seems to me that everybody does get to know everything, especially at Richerden) my mother's money is all in her own hands; and I—we—are as poor as church mice."

Mrs. Grierson smiled. "Money is a good thing and a bad thing, but not half such an important thing as some folks imagine. It need not hinder a man from going to see his own mother."

Roderick winced slightly. "Then you think my pride wrong?"

"Not pride for her," with a tender glance at Silence. "But as for yourself —a man satisfied of his own real motives should be indifferent to any imputed ones. That is not his concern at all."

"You are right—I admit it. Still, as to my wife——"

But Silence flung herself, in one of her rare outbursts of emotion, on her knees beside her husband. "Go, I beseech you, go! She is alive—you can hear her speak —you can make her understand you love her. Oh, Roderick, you don't know what it is to call when there is none to answer —to weep when there is no one to comfort you. You cannot tell what it is to feel that one's mother is dead!"

He kissed and comforted her into calm-

ness; but something struck and startled him, something which, under all her sweet cheerfulness, he had never found out before—that mystery of being "*acquainted* with grief." He himself had known vexation, annoyance, disappointment—but sorrow, heart-sorrow he had never known. She had. Young as she was, he felt from that hour that in many things his wife was both older and wiser than he.

"I will do exactly as you wish," he said. "Mrs. Grierson, will you write to my mother, and say I shall be with her at the appointed hour? But, remember—as, indeed, I shall tell her myself—that it is wholly and solely because my wife desires it."

So he went. When he came back,

which was almost immediately, he sat down beside Silence, and kissed her without a word.

"Well, dear?"

"Well, my love, I have done as you wished, and—there is an end of it."

"What did she say?"

"We had neither of us any opportunity of saying anything. She had, or discovered she had, important business at Richerden, and left at eight this morning."

"Without any letter or message?"

"Without one single word. And now, my wife, that page is turned over. Let us close the book and begin again. Is it not best, Mrs. Grierson?"

The old lady hesitated. There were tears in her kindly eyes.

"It shall be best," said Roderick, firmly. "Come, my darling, let us thank our dear friend here for all her goodness to us. Let us pack up our boxes and return to Blackhall."

To Roderick, as perhaps to most men, anything decided was easier than a thing uncertain. He recovered his spirits sooner than Silence, who was greatly distressed, could at all have expected. Perhaps, like many of us, having resolved to do a painful thing, he was not sorry when fate stepped in to prevent his doing it. And he listened patiently to Mrs. Grierson's arguments against rashly judging what might have been pure accident or unavoidable necessity.

"We shall see," he said. "In the

meantime, need we say any more? My wife and I have an equal dislike to talking it over. Let us all forget it, and spend a happy last day together."

It was happy, and the next day too. Mrs. Grierson, who while consenting to their departure had sorely regretted it, accompanied them part way on their journey, and made it as easy as she could. Her farewell words, too, were given with unmistakable, earnest affection. "Roderick, take care of your wife."

He did take care of her, with an instinct new, but strangely sweet. Most men have passion in them; many have a kindly good nature and a sort of ever-craving affectionateness which passes for love; but very few have that tenderness — that

generous devotion of the strong to the weak, the helpful to the helpless, which constitutes the highest manliness, and which is best described by the scripture phrase, "I was as an husband unto them." Roderick had it.

Lovely as the day was—one of those rare late autumn days which in Scotland make earth look like paradise—and beautiful as was the scenery through which they passed, Silence was so tired with her journey that for the last few miles she lay with her head on Roderick's shoulder, scarcely speaking a word, and only rousing herself when she saw, glimmering like stars in the distance, the window lights of Blackhall.

"Ah!" she sighed, "that must be home."

"'East or west, hame is best,' 'Home is home, be it ever so homely,'" said Roderick, as he lifted her indoors, and set her in the large arm-chair by the blazing fire, seeing nothing, heeding nothing, except the little pale face which to him was so infinitely dear.

Not until tea was over, and her cheerful smile had fully returned, did he notice, among the small heap of papers lying waiting for him, the fatal well-known book-packet—the MS. returned.

He tried to cover it over, and not let his wife see it, but her eye was too quick. Vain, too, was the innocent deception of his protest that he had "fully expected this," and "did not care."

"But I care," said Silence, mournfully.

And then the poor young things sat down face to face with their bitter disappointment, and tried to bear it as well as they could.

The third "stony-hearted" publisher had taken a good deal of trouble over the rejected MS. He had had it read carefully, and enclosed the "reader's" opinion, a shrewd, kindly, and, if severe, not unjust analysis of the whole; holding out a hope that after long years of patient study the author might succeed in finding a public, not for that, but for something else of a different sort.

"Very kind of him," said Roderick, passively; "and in the meantime we may starve."

"Not quite that, dear," said Silence,

gently. "You know we have enough for ourselves if we live wholly to ourselves. Remember what Mrs. Grierson was saying the other day, that the greatest evil of poverty was because people will not spend their money upon their own family and its needs, but in making a show before the eyes of the world. Now, this might be necessary at Richerden, but here where we live so quietly——"

"Quietly—quietly! Blackhall will soon drive me mad with its quietness! To vegetate here upon a pound or two a week, so long as there was the remotest chance of working my way to something better! I can't do it; no man could."

"And no woman who really loved her husband would let him do it."

"Thank you, my darling. I thought you would say so. Even though you are a woman you can understand. You will not be a coward? You will buckle on my breastplate and let me plunge into the fight? Then, like our friend Macbeth—

'At least I'll die with harness on my back.'"

She laughed—they both laughed. Ay, even through all their distress. There was in them that wonderful ever-renewed spring of hope which, in pure natures, is long before it runs dry.

"So that is settled. I will see Mr. Black to-morrow about the possibility of letting Blackhall, and then, if we can let it, we will go to London at once."

Silence made no reply. Her drooped face turned white—then scarlet—then white once more.

"Come, wise little woman, what is the matter with you? You have given your consent, now give your opinion. Where shall we go, and when?"

"I think, if you will let it be so, I should like us to stay quietly here until the spring."

"Why? What possible reason——"

Silence put both her arms round her husband's neck, and looked at him, right into his eyes, a strangely solemn, tender, absolutely speechless look.

Then—he knew.

END OF THE SECOND VOLUME.

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